

## Life Brought at a Tender Age: The Lived Experiences of Filipino Teenage Pregnant Women

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**Abstract** - Unintended teenage pregnancy is an ever-present issue in developing countries such as the Philippines. The impact of teenage pregnancy affects the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual well being of the adolescents. Teen pregnancies carry extra health risks to both the mother and the baby. Nurses play a crucial role in supporting young people as trusted practitioners in a range of settings. This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of the teenage pregnant women. Six adolescent female aged 12-19 years old who were pregnant with their first child agreed to participate. A qualitative inquiry, specifically Husserlian descriptive phenomenology was employed. Semi-structured in depth face-to-face interviews were undertaken, audiotaped, transcribed, and analyzed using Colaizzi's method. The richness of the experiences shared by the selections provided the necessary information to understand and describe the essence of the phenomenon under study. Cool and warm analyses captured the following emergent themes of Trends toward issues, Fortified faith, and Optimistic outlook. For the selections in this study, being pregnant at a young age did not mean that their life and future were all over. The women were optimistic about their futures. The findings of the study have vital implications in offering specific programs and services and in developing educational materials that focus on preventing teen pregnancy. While health nurse practitioners primarily provide services and education to teens and parents in various health care facilities, they also can be significant participants in prevention activities and coalitions that are based in a community. The outcomes of the study have possible contributions to the nursing practice, to policies that facilitate the promotion of the health of the teenage mothers and the prevention of teenage pregnancies, and in building future researches especially in the education of the teens about the consequences of pregnancy.

Keywords: adolescent; unintended teenage pregnancy, qualitative research, Husserlian descriptive phenomenology

### I. INTRODUCTION

Over the recent past the prevalence of early and late teenage pregnancies appears to have been a ubiquitous phenomenon. The global incidence of pregnancies among females less than 18 years of age remains incipient in most countries. It is a much greater challenge and a significant issue in developing countries such as the Philippines. The magnitude of teenage pregnancies from developing countries encompasses one third of women who gave birth before the age of 20 (WHO, 2012).

Statistical information shows that Filipino female teenagers are increasingly becoming pregnant and become mothers at an early age. In the last decade, the number of live births by teenage mothers in the Philippines escalated. In the United Nations (2008) data, the Philippines ranks third highest in teenage pregnancy and has an increasing early childbearing rate compared to its neighbors in ASEAN. The United Nations Fund Population Activities (2011) annual report indicates that teenage pregnancies in the Philippines have risen by 70% from 114,205 in 1999 to 195,662 in 2009. In 2010, the latest year for which statistics are available, a total of 207,898 mothers aged below 20 years old gave birth from 126,025 in 2000 (National Statistics Office).

The impact of teenage pregnancy affects the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual well being of the adolescents. Teenage pregnancy is concomitant with a wide range of

ensuing adverse health and psychosocial outcomes. Marxshall and Jones (2012) declare that adolescent pregnancy is perilous and fatal with grave enduring and extensive consequences from health complications for young mother and the child to wider psychosocial concerns. Pregnant teens and their unborn babies have unique medical risks. World Health Organization (2012) confirms that girls under age 15 are five times more likely to die during pregnancy or childbirth as those over age 20. Gestation and childbirth in this age group increase the risks of child and maternal morbidity and mortality rate (NSO, 2009; WHO). Kirchengast (2009) declares that teenage pregnancies are considered problematic because complications from pregnancy and childbirth are the leading causes of death in teenage girls in developing countries. Teenagers may not distinguish the symptoms of pregnancy or may not wish to acknowledge a conception delaying prenatal care and endangering the health of the child and mother (Herdman, 1997). Girls that give birth under the age 16 are more likely to have long and obstructed labors due to their underdeveloped pelvic structure (WHO, 2007) and may die as a result of hemorrhage (Kamara, 2011).

The baleful psychosocial consequences of teenage pregnancy are dire and not inevitable. These tribulations involve financial challenges, disruption in education, restricted employment opportunities, separation from the child's father, and repeat pregnancy (Klein, 2005). Bruce and Bongarts (2009)

point out that the effect of teenage pregnancy also disturbs the social and economic development of the countries. Moreover, offspring born to teenage mother are more likely to have inferior educational, behavioral, and health outcomes, paralleled with children born to older parents (Hoofman & Maynard, 2008).

Extensive literature and empirical studies on maternal pregnancy ensue, however, there is still paucity of inquiries on pregnancy among teenage women especially in the Philippine context: thus, the interest of the researchers on this particular research topic. The study aimed to explore the lived experiences of Filipino pregnant women in their teen years. It addressed the central question: How do Filipino pregnant teenage women make sense of their experiences?

## II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Research Design

Husserl's descriptive phenomenological approach which is an inductive qualitative research tradition, rooted in the 20th century philosophical tradition of Edmund Husserl, provided the foundation of the design of the study. The method involved bringing to consciousness the selections' lived experiences as primigravida teenagers and with the aid of imaginative variation, the researchers intuited and carefully described the essence that unfolded (Husserl, 1983 in Giorgi, 2007).

### Sampling Design, Selections, and Study Site

Sampling is an essential step in this qualitative research process. The research site and selections were selected initially following a strategy called non-probability, purposeful sampling. The characteristics of the study participants were used as the basis of selection. Due to the iterative nature of the study, eventually theoretical sampling was done wherein continual sampling, collection and analysis of data to inform the next stage of the sample design were done, until 'theoretical saturation' was achieved.

To gain an in-depth understanding and description of teenage pregnancy, 6 females were included as selections of the study. Since the phenomenon under study only need appear only once to be of value, the number of cases sampled is often small (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). The selections bore the following eligibility criteria: age within 12 – 19 years, economic status below minimum wage, primigravida or first time pregnancy, and their second trimester of pregnancy.

The study setting was the Out-patient Department of a tertiary government hospital, which caters to residents of the City of Caloocan.

### Instrument

To ensure flexibility for exploration and in how and in what sequence questions were asked, a self-report method specifically in depth, semi-structured, face-to-face interview was utilized to gather data. The structure of the interview was organized around a basic guide known as *aide memoire*. The interview guide ensured that all areas were covered and dealt with during the course of the data collection process.

After approval from the gatekeeper of the mentioned study site, pilot testing or feasibility study was done with one selection to validate the guide questions prepared. No revision was required. Consent forms were duly signed by each selection after full disclosure of the nature of the study. Anonymity of the selections and confidentiality of the data and information gathered were observed.

### Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using the Colaizzi method of analysis for descriptive phenomenology design. Significant statements were culled from the field text and were organized using Kelly grid. Relationships, similarities, and differences were noted in the process. From the categories, emergent themes that were common and predominating among selections were captured. Formulated meanings were organized into themes that were integrated into an exhaustive description (Turunen, Perala, & Merilainen, 2011). To ensure the trustworthiness of the empirical study, two validation techniques were employed namely: members checking and critical friends.

All rules of ethics were observed throughout the research process. To investigate the phenomenon with objectivity, the researchers espoused the attitude of the phenomenological reduction by bracketing past knowledge of the phenomenon and withholding their assumptions, preconceptions, beliefs and options.

### Theoretical framework

In understanding the lived experiences of the teenage pregnant women including their changes in physical, social, emotional, spiritual and psychological aspects in response to behavior and conditions was developed through the Health promotion model by Nola J. Pender (2011).

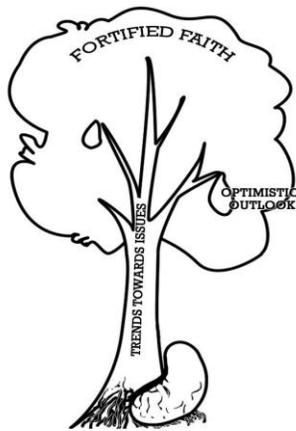
Health promotion has adapted ideas from the behavioral and social sciences to fit the concerns of public health workers. These adaptations are based on what we have learned over many years. Concrete examples and brief explanations, comparisons across theories and model at multiple levels can be applied.

The health promotion model (Pender, 2011) notes that each person has unique personal characteristics and experiences that affect subsequent actions. The set of variables for behavioral specific knowledge and affect have important motivational significance. These variables can be modified through nursing actions. Health promoting behavior is the desired behavioral outcome and is the end point in the HPM. Health promoting behaviors should result in improved health, enhanced functional ability and better quality of life at all stages of development. The final behavioral demand is also influenced by the immediate competing demand and preferences, which can derail an intended health promoting actions.

### Findings and Discussion

At the core of this empirical study three themes emerged and are typified in the simulacrum of Theophany of the

meaning making of teenage pregnant women (Figure 1). The seed represents the subject under study that is the lived experiences of the selections. It developed into a trunk that signifies the theme, *trends towards issues*. This first category speaks of the prevalence of the phenomenon that translates into issues. The crown embodies the second theme, *fortified faith* that deals with how the selections cope with the experience. Its outcome is the fruit that resulted to the third theme that is *optimistic outlook*, which promises a brighter future for the selections.



**Figure 1: Theophany of the Meaning Making of Teenage Pregnant Women**

The three themes emerged from the field texts that were subjected to cool and warm analyses expounded new knowledge and perceptions which were previously unclear (Hunter, Lusardi, Zucker, Jacelon, & Chandler, 2002). The themes were constructed guided by the classical belief of Opler (1945, cited in Bernard, 2003) emphasizing that theme expression can be subtler, opposite, symbolic and even idiosyncratic. The themes typify and characterize the lived experiences of the teenage pregnant women.

### **Theme 1: Trends towards Issues**

Teenage childbearing among Filipino adolescents has become not uncommon with the trend line heading to commonality. In this kind of direction, multifaceted events and stories of teenagers' gestation ensue. This is where the tone of trends develops into alarmed issues.

Filipinos live in a society influenced by the ever-changing trends in the community. Contemporary channels of media are varied. What usually happens and seen around are easily adopted by everyone. The use of cellular phones and easy access to multi-media influence the actions, peer pressure and the behaviors of teenagers. Television, radios and even Internet-based information are critical sources of communication and relationships among Filipino teenagers. As verbalized by our respondents, *"I only met him through chat"*. Internet chats have now been a way of meeting, knowing and contacting other people. Another means of conversing with other people is the use of modern technology that is, cellular phones. The Philippines is one of those countries inclined to using this gadget as part of their daily routine. The selections

share, *"I knew him through exchanging text messages"* and *"A friend gave his number to me, we started texting and eventually, we meet up"*.

For families living in the deprived sections of the society, being pregnant at an early age is already a trend. *"Getting pregnant at an early age is common in our community"* says a selection. Similarly, *"Lots of teenage girls get pregnant in our place"* and *"My sisters and mother also got pregnant at an early age"* as verbalized by some selections.

Poverty is correlated significantly with adolescent pregnancy in the Philippines. The selections of teenage pregnant women belong to societies with families earning below the minimum wage. For these people, going out and mingling with friends has become a part of their lives. After school, they would stay at home for a while but after that, it's the streets where they spend most of their remaining time. This is where the peers come in, and for most of the selections, it was through them that they were able to meet their boyfriends. The 15Php/hr internet access to a computer shop has been enough to make them meet another person in the chat room. This has been the avenue for them to know their boyfriends better and end up meeting in person frequently. For others, a cellular phone number has been the key to knowing another person. Exchanging text messages has been their initial way of contacting each other. Soon, meeting up for them has been on a regular basis and ultimately, intimate physical contact was made. This scenario has been common in overpopulated, below minimum wage earners in the metropolis. Being pregnant at an early age has now been frequently dealt with and thus, has become a trend in the community. Some of the selections expressed that two of her older sisters got pregnant at the age of 15 while another had her mother conceived her eldest sibling at 14 years old. For the selections, a pregnant teenager is no longer a big issue in their community. Instances like these are already ordinary to them, thus treated as an acceptable element of their society.

Aquino (2014) point out in her article the findings of a study conducted by the UP Population Institute in 2013, that new technology brings forth new sexual activities and new ways of meeting sexual partners, which could mean higher risks of pregnancy. The increased prevalence of sexual activities could also mean that the youth had new normative standards regarding sex and while new technology can be tools to increase the risks, it can also serve to mitigate it.

Santelli (2009) posits that economic disparities have increased steadily over time. Early and non-marital childbearing are found to be more frequent among disadvantaged populations. Compared with the late 1990s, the last several years have not been years of strong economic opportunity for more disadvantaged individuals, who may see less to be gained from delaying parenthood when their prospects for employment, income, marriage, and home ownership look increasingly dim. By socioeconomic status of the woman, the poorest has the highest percentage of teenage pregnancy (Natividad, 2012).

Daniels (2011) declares that teenage pregnancy is becoming an epidemic resulting to failure on the young

population. Concern on the risk of complications escalates due to the fact that these young individuals have bodies which are not yet fully developed and are not ready for childbearing.

### Theme 2: Fortified Faith

Whether the selections meant to or not, they are bringing another individual into the world and their life will be forever changed. Their spirituality remains vital in overcoming current and future obstacles. The belief in a supreme being brings forth added strength in coping up with their present condition. With that in mind, prayer has been their shield of protection with one of them saying *“With the situation I am into right now, I just pray and lift it all up to the Lord”* and the other *“Nowadays, I pray every night”*. Consequently, in compliance to their religion, one verbalized *“It would be another sin to God if I try to abort this child”* and *“I learned how to pray the rosary”*.

Filipinos have always been religious. For the selections, their attitude in terms of their relationship to God has greatly been strengthened because of what happened to them. They describe their pregnancies as being unintended. Prayer has now played a big role on how they deal with their present situation. The selections now feel the need to constantly pray to God and reflect on the reason why they got pregnant at this time of their lives. Since faith in God has been their way of accepting the condition they are into, abortion was not really an option, believing that it will be a grave sin considering the matter. Communicating with God has now been practiced everyday as opposed to before they got pregnant. One even said that she has learned how to pray the rosary daily since the pregnancy happened. For them, learning how to pray the rosary means strengthening one's faith and relationship with God.

Spirituality is a significant element of psychological well-being among Filipino adolescents. Spirituality among Filipino adolescents develops through the influence of supportive significant others and overcoming difficult life experiences (Resurreccion & Tan-Mansukhani). Interestingly, results of the study of Obligation (1997) indicate that strong faith engenders a perception of personal control or self-efficacy and a distinct determination for self-improvement among Filipino women. On their part, Lapena, Tarroja, Tirazona, and Fernando (2012) reveal in their study that even without intervention, Filipino youth are able to cope with their difficulties by relying on their inner resources.

### Theme 3: Optimistic Outlook

Having an optimistic outlook among the selections serves as a protective factor in which they demonstrate an attitude of looking at the finest things to happen in their future. Seemingly, their optimism protects them against an urge to give up and withdraw from social activities.

Being on a different and difficult situation as the respondents are into, an attitude that looks into the best possible outcome is inherent to them. As verbalized by one of the respondents, *“I still want to continue my studies so I can provide a better future for my child”*. Although there may be apprehension such as *“I somehow regret this (being pregnant) happened to me, I would be in school right now if this did not*

*happen, but I still plan to pursue my studies after giving birth”* or *“I hope other girls out there will not end up like me who got pregnant early”*, our respondents have somehow thought of ways to fight through their situation. One even said, *“Life for us has been hard financially, and now this added up to our situation, that is why after giving birth, I plan to work already”*

With the present situation of the selections, their outlook for the future has greatly changed. They not only think of themselves now but also the child they are bearing. With the economical hardships they face in life, they would wish that this will not happen to other girls of their age. Life being difficult as it is financially, an additional mouth to feed for the family will be an added burden. However, they have to face the present situation and deal with it positively. One respondent plans to work immediately upon giving birth to help in the financial expenses of the family. An added income is needed given that her boyfriend only works in the bakery. Since all of them already stopped studying, four of the respondents plan to pursue their studies. One was even a consistent honour student when she was studying. For these respondents, asking for monetary support from the boyfriend or even an expected marriage with him does not guarantee financial stability in the future. They do believe that education will be their ticket to providing a brighter future for their child.

Optimism is suggested to play an important protective role in coping with extraordinarily trying events. Phillips (2009) opines that some people are fortunate enough to be born with a sunny disposition and an optimistic outlook on life. Others can learn optimism, which can then contribute to a happier and more satisfying lifestyle. However, happy and unhappy people generally have the same number of adverse events in their lives. The difference is in their interpretation of unfortunate life events. Optimistic people are willing and able to make positive life action plans to counteract negative events in their lives. Furthermore, people with the most positive outlook about their futures tend to have better moods, fewer psychiatric symptoms and better adjustment to pregnancy, heart surgery and other situations. (Segerstrom, 2005)

### CONCLUSION

A representation, developed by the researchers as the Theophany of the Meaning Making of Teenage Pregnant Women, was crafted to comprehend and describe the lived experiences and personal views of Filipino teenage pregnant women. The selections chosen have essential knowledge and understanding of how they face their present situation. The study revealed themes covering the concerned issues (Trends towards Issues), spiritual upliftment (Fortified Faith) and the future plans of the selections (Optimistic Outlook).

Considering maternal death as one of the concerns raised in the Millennium Development Goal, this study will serve as a reference on ways to prevent maternal and child mortality. This study will also benefit the health care providers in identifying the updated contributing factors of maternal death. It will also offer a basis in developing a good nursing care plan for those handling clients with the aforementioned condition providing possible contributions to practice, policy

and other researches. The study will serve also as a reference for the nursing students and College of Nursing, building a foundation especially in a multidisciplinary approach. Furthermore, the study will be beneficial to the community as a basis of information and a tool for health care promotion especially for the teenage mothers and the unborn child.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings of the study, some recommendations were formulated. A quantitative study concerning correlational factors influencing teenage pregnant women will be undertaken. The measurement of the continued quantitative research will aim to further devise a tool in preventing illnesses concerning early pregnancy and promoting health to concerned population. The findings of the study can serve a basis for developing a health care plan to provide safe and quality care to teenagers who become pregnant. The study would likewise serve as reference in proper utilization of technology. Attention to the upbringing of the Filipino teenagers in terms of spiritual concern must be emphasized. It is likely that divine guidance served as a way to cope up with the given challenges.

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