

# LIVED EXPERIENCES OF EARLY PREGNANCY AMONG TEENAGERS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

*Angeline M. Pogoy*  
*Ed. D. Rustica Verzosa*  
*Ed. D. Nerlie S. Coming*  
*Ronalissa G. Agustino*

Cebu Normal University, Cebu City, Philippines

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## Abstract

This case study attempts to determine the lived experiences of early pregnancy among high and low performing students in terms of the causes, effects, challenges and their coping mechanisms. The naturalistic paradigm was used in the study with the purposively chosen informants with varied tools to cross-check their responses. Results show that curiosity, lack of sexual knowledge, financial and family problems and uncontrolled emotions cause pregnancy among teenagers. Teenage mothers face a lot of challenges after pregnancy like providing proper care and needs of their child. High performing teenage mothers are college levels and work for a living to support the needs of their child. Low performing teenage mothers ended up as housewives. Teenage mothers have less possibility to finish their studies after engaging in early pregnancy. Taking care of the baby and providing financial assistance are challenges they encountered and tried to cope up with. The academic performance, the financial status and support of the family of teenage mothers determine if they can pursue their studies and achieve their dreams in life. Sex and sexuality education should not just be a concept but should be developed further as a complete discipline and much more research should be conducted to that regard.

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**Keywords:** Teenage pregnancy, naturalistic paradigm, coping mechanism

## Introduction

Adolescence is a stage where teenagers adjust in their physical and emotional changes in life (Lerner & Steinberg, 2004). Teenagers prefer to go with their peers rather than with their parents due to strong peer pressure. Early adolescence also represent the period of sexual maturation

(Montgomery 2003). One of the issue that they may encounter is teenage pregnancy which causes drop outs among female secondary students (Brindis and Philber, 2003). This scenario is conspicuous for educators, policy makers and the public, hence, imposed to be a major problem of the society (Spear 2004).

Teenage pregnancy in the Philippines rise 70% over 10 years, ( Ugochi, Daniels 2012) United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) country representative said the number of teenage pregnancies in the country is an area of concern that the agency is giving serious attention, exposing as it does adolescent girls(10-19) to high risk. According to the Fair and Fearless Freeman (2005), there is a rising trend of pregnant young women in the country and most of them are unmarried. Young women are more vulnerable to death during pregnancy, hence they are not prepared physically and mentally in motherhood. This reflects that young women have in adequate information about pregnancy.

According to Grant and Hallman (2006), the competing risk of adolescent who drop- out of school for other reason than teenage pregnancy. They provided evidence that low economic status strongly associate with school drop outs and teenage pregnancy. Stewart (2003) theorized that adolescents with high educational aspirations are less likely to engage in teenage pregnancy while enrolled in school. This is because they are highly motivated by their studies and have the impetus to pursue to college. Turner (2004), stated that students with low self -esteem and poor school performance have no realistic expectations about education. Pregnancy served to be their path to economic independence and adult status. The factors which influenced adolescents to engage in early pregnancy are unsafe sex, deprivation, substance misuse, school drop outs, bad school performance in school and low family income ( Tsai and Wong, 2003).

Many researchers viewed that teenage mothers future will be depressing and some challenges will be experienced (Tonelli 2004). After pregnancy teenage mother lacks qualifications which mean they have low paid and often unsatisfying jobs, but some young mothers worked out of necessity because they had no choice. A big challenge for a teenage mother is how to give a bright future for the child. However, as well as the money, there were additional, wider benefits. Working also gave women a sense of accomplishment, confidence and some much needed social contact (Wiggins 2005).

Teenage pregnancy became an intricate problem of the different agencies. These agencies promote programs which is useful in the prevention of teenage pregnancy (Brindis & Philber,2003).According to Duncan (2007), special programs on family life and reproductive health reduces the number of teenage pregnancy, alcohol and drug abuse.

This research sought to determine the causes, effects and challenges and coping mechanisms of teenage pregnancy among high or low performing students enrolled in different schools in Cebu City.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Teenage pregnancy is not like any other issue there in the whole world although it seems to be a common concern, it does not seem to bother people that much. Not until they are personally affected by the issue or until they finally realized that it had been increasing in number of affected people that it slowly reached an abnormal stage or the point that it affected too many lives already and too many aspects of living.

Teenage pregnancy is mostly unplanned, and as a result, people react to the experience differently. The teenager has to come to terms with the unexpected demands of being an adult, and in some cases, she may also have to deal with disapproval and dissatisfaction shown by significant others like parents and relatives (Clemens, 2002). According to Macleod and Durrheim (2003), teenage pregnancy as a social problem that leads to the disruption of schooling; poor obstetric outcomes, inadequate mothering; poor child outcomes; relationship difficulties with relatives, partners and peers; and demographic concerns about increasing population numbers.

In major cases, teenage mothers are not in a position to go back to school after delivery as they are forced to look after their children. In some cases, these young mothers' physical health conditions do not make it conducive for them to go back to school. While some young women may be prevented from going back to school as a result of these factors, De Jang (2001) found that there are some cases of teenagers who may use their pregnant status to deliberately escape the demands of high school education.

Depression is one of the problems that results to teenage pregnancy of the women. According to the psychodynamic theory, depression is presented as a disorder that can be linked to real or imagined object loss (Gee and Rhodes 2003).

According to Giddens (2001:23), cultural factors refer to culture as the way of life of the members of a society, or of groups within a society. It includes how people dress, their marriage customs and family life, their patterns of work, religious ceremonies and leisure pursuits.

Socialization is also a factor. He defines socialization as the process by which humans learn the culture of their society and become adult members of that society in which they live. Socialization teaches humans to live in society and what is regarded as appropriate behaviour in different situations (Giddens 2001:26).

Cultural norms and values could be the detriment of teenage mother's empowerment and could contribute to greater confusion in teenagers minds (Dlamini 2002: 45).

A study of Ehlers (2003), found that the female adolescents who were poor students with low educational aspirations were more likely to become teenage mothers than were their high-achieving peers. On the other hand, he also stated some of the causes of teenage pregnancy such as lack of parental guidance, adolescent sexual behaviour, inadequate knowledge about safe sex, exploitation by older men and socio-economic factors.

**Lack of parental guidance:** Most people evade their children from talking about sex. In some cases, they provide false information regarding sex and discourage their children to participate in any informative discussion about sex.

**Adolescent sexual behaviour:** Among the adolescents, peer pressure is a major factor that encourages the teenage boys and girls to indulge in sexual activities. Early dating, as early as 12 years of age, is another factor that contributes to teen pregnancy.

**Inadequate knowledge about safe sex:** Most adolescents are unaware of safe sex. They probably have no access to the traditional methods of preventing pregnancy. And the main reason behind is that they are either too embarrassed or fear to seek information about it.

**Exploitation by older men:** This is another major factor that contributes to pregnancy among the teenagers. Those girls who date older men are more likely to become pregnant before they attain womanhood. Rape, sexual exploitation also takes place that leads to unwanted pregnancy among teenage girls.

**Socio-economic factors:** Teenage girls who belong to the poor families are more likely to become pregnant.

According to Quinlivan et al., (2003: 203), lack of educational achievement is a risk factor not only because of limited career and educational opportunities but also because of its correlation with a lack of motivation and ambition. Young people uncertain of a purpose in life or a career objective identify parenting as a future role (Quinlivan 2004: 202).

According to Williams (2005:75) adolescents generally encounter more problems during pregnancy and child birth than older women. The long- term effects of pregnancies are far reaching and teenage mothers face difficulties such as dropping out of school. The problems encountered may be physical, psychological, social, academic and emotional. Dlamini (2002:178) stated in his study the problems that might affect the pregnant adolescents' psychologically, emotionally and also the social relations with the people around them, including the support from individuals. And also there are some challenges that they encountered such as: the father of the

child were not willing to support or even denied for being a father and non-acceptance of pregnancy by the adolescents' parents.

Adolescent pregnancy and child birth impose difficult long-term outcomes and have adverse effects not only on the young mother, but also on her child (Hao & Cherlin, 2004; Meade & Ickovics, 2005). A study of Darisi (2007) stated that a negative perspective on teen pregnancy leads to a negative view of pregnant teens. The young woman who becomes pregnant sets in motion a series of events that ultimately leads to the disaster of a teen birth. The pregnant teen becomes a statistic and assumptions are made about her character, intelligence and maturity. Young mothers are often well-aware of these assumptions.

According to Ioannidi-Kapolou (2004) lack of accurate information on sex education is one of the reasons for the increasing number of unwanted pregnancies among teenagers. However, Watson (2003) stated that a strategy can be successful only when a multi agency tasked group is formed with representatives that provide services and work closely with children and young people.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

This study made use of a naturalistic paradigm. It is a phenomenological study type that analyzes and reports the status of the purposively chosen informants. The researchers conducted personal interview to the teenage mothers. The focused group (FG) constituted the informants' parent/guardian whom they live with and known to be their closed friends. There were two (2) friends for every informant. The parent/guardian and the informants' friends serve as the validators of the informants' responses to eliminate biases. The use of triangulation enabled the researchers to cross-check the results and facilitate the understanding of the complex and multi-dimensional aspects of the informants' responses.

The researchers selected ten (10) teenage mothers as respondents and were categorized into five (5) high performing students ( average of 85 and above) and five (5) low performing students( average of 84 and below). The data gathered through interviews conducted in the research locale in the barangays of Cebu City namely: Brgy. Kalunasan, Brgy. Sapangdaku and Brgy. Guadalupe.

The personal interview for the informants' parent/guardian and friends conducted in their houses. The researchers conducted an interview first with teenage mother which serves as respondent. Next, the parent/guardian and then, the close friends. The interview questions made in English but the researchers translate it into vernacular while asking the informants for clear understanding. One researcher asked while the other one jot down the responses. The questionnaires consist of questions that sought

to answer the data needed. The study used the demographic profile, interview results includes the causes of engaging in early sexuality, the effects of early pregnancy, the challenges they encountered and the coping mechanism that they used in order to cope up in their situations.

Demographic profile consists of the economic status of the family whether they have a high or low income, occupation of the parents, educational attainment and history of married life of the parents.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Demographic Profile**

The study involved ten (10) teenage mothers as informants. They were categorized into high and low performing students in terms of academic performance, five (5) of them were low performing, five (5) of them also were high performing. The academic performance identified based on their school records before they got pregnant.

The informants were 14 to 19 years with an average of 17 years of age. Most of them were housewives and were married. Two (2) or 20% of them were 1<sup>st</sup> year high school, one (1) or 10% of them were 3<sup>rd</sup> year high school, four (4) or 40% of them were high school graduates, two (2) or 20% were 1<sup>st</sup> year college and one (1) or 10% of them were 3<sup>rd</sup> year college.

The informants' parents were labourer, housemaid, driver, sari-sari store owner and government employee. Their monthly income range from ₱2,400.00-₱15,000.00 but most of them belongs to ₱3,000.00/month. Most of their parents were elementary and high school graduates. Only one (1) of the informants' parent finished college.

The parents got married at the age of 17-22 with an average of 17 years of age. The support given by the parents were both moral and financial support except for the one (1) parent, she didn't give financial support. The said parent was the parent of the two informants who engage in early pregnancy.

### Table of Responses of the Teenage Mothers

<b>Teenage Mother (Low Academic Performance)</b>	<b>Causes</b>	<b>Effects</b>	<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Coping Mechanisms</b>
Respondent 1	Curiosity	School Drop out	Rearing the Child	Looking forward to give proper care of the child.
Respondent 2	Family Problem	School Drop Out	Rearing the Child	Taking care of the child and think positive that i could do better in rearing my child.
Respondents 3	Physical Drive/Sexual Drive	Low job qualification	Difficulty in providing adequate financial needs to support her child.	Giving the best that she can to rear her children .
Respondents 4	Curiosity and Lack of Sexual Knowledge	School Drop Out Stereotyped by the society	Difficulty in bringing back her self confidence	She just think on her child's welfare and never mind what other people would say.
Respondents 5	Family and Financial Problem	School Drop Out	Difficulty in giving financial support to her child.	Giving her best to be a good mother and a good wife to her husband.

<b>Teenage Mother (High Academic Performance)</b>	<b>Causes</b>	<b>Effects</b>	<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Coping Mechanisms</b>
Respondent 1	Family Problem	School Drop Out	Difficulty in proving financial support to her child.	Thinking positive and doing her best to support the child .
Respondent 2	Physical Drive/Sexual Drive	School Drop Out Low Job Qualification	Facing the great burden in providing the needs of the child	She work hard to support he child and save money to pursue her studies
Respondents 3	Physical Drive/Sexual Drive	School Drop Out	Difficulty in bringing back her self confidence	Giving her best in rearing her children.
Respondents 4	Family and Financial Problem	School Drop Out	She developed a feeling of insecurity on her colleagues who already finished their studies.	Looking forward to pursue my studies to give brighter future to my child
Respondents 5	Family Problem and Physical Drive/Sexual Drive	Early Marriage	She have difficulties in giving time to her child because giving much time to work.	After she finished her degree , she strived hard to find good job and provide a bright future to her child

## Causes and Effects of Teenage Pregnancy

Teenage mothers have different causes in engaging in teenage pregnancy. However, there were some who were similar to the other informants' responses but the effects have great differences with their lives. One of the causes was curiosity. They were curious in sexuality wherein they lack of sexual knowledge. They only heard it from their neighbours, friends, boyfriends, media and parents. They didn't have a clear knowledge on sexuality and the effects if they engaged in such thing. Sex education helps students to widen their knowledge about sexuality. Hence, there is a need for schools to integrate sexuality education in the curriculum inadequacy of knowledge.

Lack of sexual knowledge had big impact in teenagers who engaged in early sexuality. They misunderstood the information that they heard. The informants revealed that they didn't get any responsible sexual information at school. They just heard it from the people around them. This evidence is manifested when informant1 who belongs to a low performing student said

*"...Wala man me naghisingot anah sa school, ambot lang. Basta nakabati rako about sexuality din nacurious man ko if unsa jud na nga butang. So, mao na nitry ko". ( "We never had sex education in school. I don't know anything about it. I've just heard about sexuality and got curious, that's why I tried engaging to sexuality").*

The other reasons were family and financial problem wherein respondents wanted to escape problems related to family. Misunderstanding between family members and they lack of financial support from parents. The respondents thought that enjoying in an early relationship will help them escape from home. The informant6 who belongs to a high performing student said

*" ... Sige raman away ako parents. Samuk kayo sa amua. Din strikta pajud kaau ako mama dili ko kaopen nya if naa ko problema. Dili ko musulti gane niya about ana uyab-uyab kay masuko man. Dili gane ko hatagan ug kwarta, maypa ang uyab muhatag pa. Ganahan nalang ko mupalayo nila para walay samuk.Mao to one night wala ko niuli sa amua, didto nalang ko sa akong uyab. Mao to nahitabo ang dili angay mahitabo". ( "My parents always quarrel. Our home is in chaos. My mother was so strict. I can't open up my problems to her. I don't even tell her about my love life because I know she would get angry with me. She won't even give me money, that's why my boyfriend is giving me my financial needs. That's why, one night I didn't go home because I decided to go with my boyfriend. So, that's it, the thing that shouldn't happen really happened").*

Physical drive / Sexual drive was also a cause of teenagers to engage in early pregnancy. They were easily driven by their emotions and forgot



their limitations. The respondent 4 who belongs to a low performing student said

*“... Love man naku akong uyab mao nabuhat to naku. Nadala ra me sa among emotions. Nakalimot nku sa akong limitation, but I do it to prove sa akong bf nga love jud naku siya ug willing naku ihatag niya tanan.”***(“I made it because I love my boyfriend. We’re driven by our emotions. I forgot my limitations but I did it to prove him that I love him and I am willing to give everything”).**

The academic performances of teenage mothers had slightly influenced their decision in dropping-out of school after pregnancy. High performing students had greater impetus to proceed their studies only if they have financial capabilities. This is testified by one (1) of a high performing informants with high financial status

*“...Nipadayon jud ko sa eskwela after ko nanganak kay sayang man. That’s why I finished my course and now I can assure that I can provide a bright future to my child.”* ( ***I continued my studies after I gave birth because it’s a waste of time if I stop. That’s why I finished my course and now I can assure that I can provide a bright future to my child.***)

On the other hand, low performing students had no interest in going back to school because they believed that they could do better in taking care of their child rather than sending themselves in school and could not support financially in their studies. One of the low performing informants with low economic status said

*“...Wala nako balak mubalik ug eskwela kay mao gihapon gagmay ug grado. Kapoy eskwela. Focus nalang ko sa akong anak, naa bitaw akong bana magtrabaho. Unya ang kwarta, igo raman para sa amo panginahanglan.”***(“I didn’t have plan to go back in school because I still have low grades. I’m tired of studying. I rather focus to my baby besides my husband is there to support us. The money is just enough to support our needs”).**

Teenage mother lacks qualifications which mean they have low paid and often unsatisfying jobs, but some young mothers worked out of necessity because they had no choice. A big challenge for a teenage mother is how to give a bright future for the child. However, as well as the money, there were additional, wider benefits. Working also gave women a sense of accomplishment and confidence. The informant<sup>8</sup> who belongs to a high performing student said

*“...Saleslady ko sa Gaisano dae. Gamay ra jud akong sweldo kumpara sa nakahuman jud ug eskwela, pero ok nalang atleast makasupport lang jud sa panginahanglan sa akong anak. Lisud jud kaayu makakita ug trabaho dae woi labaw nag high school graduate ra ka, then kinahanglanon pod manarbaho kay di paigo ang supportar sa akong bana sa*

*panginahanlan namu labaw na sa bata. Hinuon malingaw ra man sad ko , in this way man gud maconfident ko sa akong self labaw na i work with different people.” (“I’m a sales lady in Gaisano. We are low paid compared to those who finished their college degree, but at least I could support the needs of my child. It’s really hard to find good job especially if you’re only a high school graduate, then need to work because the financial support that that I got from my husband is not enough for our needs, and the needs of our child as well. However, I enjoy working, in this way I gain more confidence to myself hence, I’m dealing with different kinds of people”).*

Teenage mothers are not in a position to go back to school after delivery as they are forced to look after their children. There are some cases of teenagers who may use their pregnant status to deliberately escape the demands of high school education. Lack of educational achievement is a risk factor not only because of limited career and educational opportunities but also because of its correlation with a lack of motivation and ambition. Young people uncertain of a purpose in life or a career objective identify parenting as a future role. The informant 3 who belongs to a low performing student said

*“...Ni undang jud ko pagbuntis naku. Nya wa nakoy plan nga muskol kay lisud byaan ang bata. Nawad an naman pod kog gana sa skwela kay kapoy magtuon ug di pod ko utokan. Anhe nlang kos balay kay mas daku ako ikatabang sa kong bana nga mag atiman kos among mga anak”. (**I drop out of school since I am pregnant. I have no plan to go back to school because it’s hard for me to leave my child. In the other hand, I lost my interest in finishing my studies hence, I’m not smart. I’d rather be at home since I could contribute more to my husband in taking care if our child”).***

### **Challenges and Coping Mechanism**

Teenage mothers had encountered lot of challenges which strengthen their personalities.. They need to prioritize things especially in parenthood. As parent, they had big responsibility to face like providing proper care and needs of the child. Rearing a child was a great challenge especially for a teenage mother because they were not yet prepare but they faced it with courage. Even they knew that they might be at risk, they were willing to give their sacrifices for the benefit of their child. This is testified by informant9 who belongs to a high academic performance

*“...Bisan unsa kalisud sa panahon ug kakapoy sa lawas naningkamot japon ko pangita ug trabaho ug gikaloy-an sa Ginoo nakakita jud tawn ug work. Basta para sa akong anak andam ko musakripisyo.” (“**Even how difficult and tired to find a job but still I made it and God’s well, I found a job. I am willing to sacrifice everything for my child”).***

Adolescent mothers cope up in their depressing situation by looking forward towards the things that they could do to support their child's need. Their concerns were already directed to the welfare of their child and to give them brighter future. They have different ways in taking the responsibility as a mother. High performing students are looking forward to find job to support their children and have plan to proceed in their studies. This evidence is manifested by informant10 with high academic performance

*"...After ko nanganak naningkamot ko pangita ug trabaho kay para makasupport ko sa akong anak. Dili ko ganahan magsalig sa akong bana. Din nagtigom sad ko sabin para makatiwas ko ug eskwela". (" **After I gave birth I did my best to find job to support my baby. I don't like to depend on my husband. Besides I am also saving money so that I can proceed my studies**".)*

On the other hand, low performing students took the role of taking care of their children and gave the financial responsibility to their husband. They managed their failure by putting things right in taking the great responsibility of rearing their children.

*"...Naa rako sa balay nag atiman sa akong anak. Ug akong bana maoy nagsuport namo financially. Ang ako rajud ikahatg nga support sa akong anak kay pagpadako niya ug sakto kanang dili makaagi sa akong naagian".(" **I am just a housewife. Only my husband supported us financially. The only support that I could give my child is to rear him in a right way so that he could not experience the things I experienced**".)*

Both high performing and low performing students overcome their failures by giving their best support to their children and forget about regrets but instead they faced every challenge to strengthen the family relationship. Taking the risk was the best thing they have done for their children.

## **Conclusion**

Teenage mothers have less possibility to finish their studies after engaging in early pregnancy. Taking care of the baby and providing financial assistance are challenges they encountered and tried to cope up with. The academic performance, the financial status and support of the family of teenage mothers determines if they can pursue their studies and achieve their dreams in life.

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