

A Qualitative Study on the Lived Experiences of Young Mothers Transitioning from Schooling to Early Parenthood

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of 15 young mothers aged 15 to 25 in Barangay Union, Dapa, Surigao del Norte, who transitioned from schooling to early parenthood. Employing a qualitative descriptive design and purposive sampling, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify the emotional, social, and educational challenges encountered during this transition. The findings revealed five core themes: family background before pregnancy, emotional turmoil and social reactions, educational disruption alongside economic hardships, coping strategies, and aspirations for

educational continuity. Results indicated that early parenthood severely hindered academic trajectories due to school dropout, financial constraints, and pervasive social stigma. Despite these barriers, the participants demonstrated significant resilience, relying on family support, personal determination, and faith as primary coping mechanisms. Most young mothers expressed a strong desire to resume their studies through alternative learning systems or vocational programs to improve their long-term prospects. Ultimately, the study underscores the urgent need for inclusive educational policies, robust community support systems, and flexible learning opportunities tailored to the needs of adolescent parents. By understanding these lived realities, stakeholders can develop more responsive social and educational interventions that support adolescent mothers in overcoming systemic hurdles and achieving their future goals.

Keywords: *Adolescent motherhood; early parenthood; school discontinuity; teenage pregnancy; lived experiences; qualitative research; educational resilience*

INTRODUCTION

Teenage pregnancy remains a significant global public health and social concern. Research indicates that early childbearing often disrupts educational participation and contributes to school dropout among adolescent girls. Studies have shown that teenage pregnancy is strongly associated with interruption of schooling, limiting educational attainment and future economic opportunities for young mothers (Azevedo et al., 2021; Masterson et al., 2021). In many developing countries, adolescent mothers face substantial barriers in continuing their education due to caregiving responsibilities, social stigma, and limited institutional support systems.

Early motherhood presents numerous challenges that affect not only the educational trajectory but also the social, emotional, and economic well-being of young mothers. Research has shown that adolescent mothers frequently encounter discrimination, social exclusion, and limited access to resources, which may negatively influence their life opportunities and psychological well-being (Ellis-Sloan, 2019). These experiences often contribute to financial instability and reduced social mobility. Despite these difficulties, many young mothers continue to express aspirations to pursue education, secure employment, and improve their living conditions.

This study focuses on the lived experiences of young mothers who transitioned from being students to becoming full-time caregivers. Through a qualitative approach, the research explores their perceptions of early motherhood and how this transition has shaped their lives. Although early pregnancy is frequently associated with negative educational and employment outcomes, scholars argue that such perspectives may overlook the resilience and adaptive strategies developed by young mothers as they navigate motherhood and personal development (Ellis-Sloan, 2019).

By understanding their stories, this study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on adolescent motherhood, educational discontinuity, and the need for more inclusive educational and social support systems. Recognizing the lived realities of young mothers may help inform educational policies, community-based interventions, and guidance programs designed to better support adolescent mothers in continuing their education and improving their life opportunities.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the lived experiences of young mothers who transitioned from schooling to early parenthood. Qualitative descriptive research is appropriate for studies that aim to obtain a comprehensive summary of participants' experiences in their natural contexts and to interpret the meanings they attach to those experiences (Sandelowski, 2000). This design allows researchers to capture detailed narratives and gain deeper insights into the social, emotional, and educational challenges encountered by young mothers. Through this approach, the study sought to

understand how participants interpret their transition from being students to assuming parental responsibilities.

Research Locale and Context

The study was conducted in Barangay Union, Dapa, Surigao del Norte, Philippines. This community was selected due to the presence of several reported cases of early motherhood among adolescents who discontinued their education after becoming parents. The locality provides an appropriate context for examining the educational and social challenges experienced by young mothers in rural communities. Understanding the experiences of participants within this context helps illuminate the broader social realities influencing adolescent motherhood and educational discontinuity.

Participants of the Study

The participants consisted of fifteen (15) young mothers aged 15 to 25 years who had experienced early parenthood during or shortly after their schooling years. Participants were selected based on their direct experience with the phenomenon being studied. The sample size is consistent with qualitative research practices, where smaller groups are often used to allow for in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives and lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Sampling Technique

The study utilized purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique commonly used in qualitative research to identify participants who possess relevant knowledge and experience related to the research topic (Palinkas et al., 2015). This method ensured that the participants had firsthand experience transitioning from schooling to early parenthood and could provide meaningful insights into the challenges, coping mechanisms, and life adjustments associated with this transition.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was guided by a set of open-ended questions designed to explore participants' personal experiences, educational challenges, emotional struggles, and coping strategies as young mothers. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allow flexibility in questioning while still maintaining a structured focus on the research objectives (Kallio et al., 2016). The interview guide was reviewed by research experts to establish content validity and was pilot tested with individuals who shared similar characteristics with the target participants to ensure clarity and relevance.

Data Collection Procedure

Prior to the interview's, informed consent was obtained from all participants to ensure voluntary participation and adherence to ethical standards. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their rights as research participants, and the confidentiality of their responses. Interviews were conducted in a private and secure environment to ensure participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences. With

participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accurate data capture. The recordings were later transcribed verbatim and translated into English when necessary to facilitate analysis. The semi-structured format allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences while enabling the researchers to probe for deeper understanding.

Data Analysis Procedure

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely used qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis followed several stages. First, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data by reading the transcripts multiple times. Second, initial codes were generated based on recurring ideas, phrases, and concepts found in the transcripts. Third, related codes were grouped into broader categories to identify emerging patterns. Finally, these categories were organized into overarching themes that reflected the shared experiences of the participants. This systematic process ensured that the findings remained grounded in the participants' narratives while allowing meaningful interpretation of their experiences.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical standards for research involving human participants. Participants were provided with written informed consent forms explaining the purpose of the research, procedures, and their rights as participants. They were informed that participation was **voluntary** and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. To protect participants' identities, **pseudonyms** were used in place of real names throughout the study. All collected data were treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for research purposes.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the findings, the study followed the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Credibility. Credibility was enhanced through prolonged engagement with participants and member checking, where participants reviewed the interpretations of their responses to ensure accuracy.

Transferability. Detailed descriptions of the research context, participants, and procedures were provided to allow readers to determine the applicability of the findings to other settings.

Dependability. An audit trail documenting the research procedures, interview processes, and analytical decisions was maintained to ensure transparency and replicability.

Confirmability. Researcher reflexivity and careful documentation of analytical processes were applied to minimize bias and ensure that the findings were grounded in the participants' narratives rather than the researchers' assumptions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Participants

Fifteen young mothers participated in this study (Respondents 1–15). At the time of pregnancy, their ages ranged from 15 to 18 years, and their grade levels ranged from Grade 9 to Grade 12. Most participants reported coming from low- to lower-middle-income households and were living with parents, grandparents, or extended family members who served as primary support systems.

This demographic pattern is consistent with global and regional studies showing that adolescent pregnancy tends to occur more frequently among socioeconomically vulnerable populations, where limited educational opportunities, economic constraints, and social inequalities increase the risk of early parenthood (Azevedo et al., 2021; Yakubu & Salisu, 2018).

Theme 1: Life Before Pregnancy and Family Background

Findings

Before pregnancy, most respondents described living relatively typical school-centered lives. They attended classes regularly, participated in extracurricular activities, and had clear educational goals such as becoming nurses, teachers, or hospitality workers. However, many reported limited financial resources and family structures that included single parents, extended households, or parents working abroad.

Representative Quotes

“I was focused on my studies and sports. Everything changed when I got pregnant.” (R7)

“I planned to finish senior high and study nursing.” (R1)

Discussion

These findings reflect previous research indicating that adolescent pregnancy frequently interrupts educational trajectories that were previously oriented toward academic achievement and career development (Yakubu & Salisu, 2018). Family contexts such as parental migration, single-parent households, and extended caregiving arrangements can also influence adolescents’ life experiences and decision-making processes. Studies suggest that socioeconomic disadvantage and family instability may increase vulnerability to early pregnancy and educational discontinuity (Azevedo et al., 2021).

Theme 2: Emotional Turmoil and Social Reaction to Pregnancy

Findings

The discovery of pregnancy triggered strong emotional reactions among participants, including shock, fear, anxiety, and denial. Many respondents were particularly concerned about how their families and communities would react. Initial responses from parents often included anger, disappointment, or strict reprimands, although several families later became supportive. Participants also reported experiencing social stigma, gossip, and distancing from peers and neighbors.

Representative Quotes

“When I found out I was pregnant, I cried for days. I was scared to tell my parents because I knew they would be disappointed.” (R1)

“I was in disbelief. I took three tests before accepting it was true.” (R4)

“My family scolded me at first. I felt judged by neighbors and classmates.” (R3)

Discussion

These experiences mirror findings in adolescent pregnancy literature where young mothers often report feelings of shame, fear, and emotional distress after learning about their pregnancy (Mollborn, 2017). Social stigma and community judgment have also been identified as significant stressors that affect the psychological well-being of teenage mothers and may discourage them from seeking social or institutional support (Ellis-Sloan, 2019). Such experiences can intensify emotional stress during an already challenging transition to motherhood.

Theme 3: Educational Disruption and Economic Challenges

Findings

Nearly all participants experienced interruption of their schooling. Some stopped attending school due to embarrassment and stigma, while others reported being discouraged from attending classes once their pregnancy became visible. Financial challenges were also widely reported, including difficulties in purchasing baby formula, diapers, and other essential needs. Several participants described reliance on parents or relatives for financial assistance.

Representative Quotes

“I had to stay home all day, and I missed learning. We didn’t have enough money for baby supplies.” (R3)

“My school didn’t allow me to attend classes after my belly showed.” (R6)

Discussion

School interruption among pregnant adolescents has been widely documented across different contexts. Studies show that early childbearing is strongly associated with school dropout and reduced educational attainment, which can limit future employment opportunities (Azevedo et al., 2021; Yakubu & Salisu, 2018). Financial strain further compounds the challenges faced by adolescent mothers, as limited income and increased childcare expenses can create long-term economic vulnerability (Mollborn, 2017).

Theme 4: Coping Strategies and Sources of Strength

Findings

Despite the challenges they faced, participants demonstrated significant resilience and adaptive coping mechanisms. The most commonly reported sources of strength included support from family members particularly mothers and grandmothers' partners, religious faith, and personal motivation to provide for their children. Some participants also reported practical coping strategies such as organizing daily tasks, relying on relatives for childcare, and planning small income-generating activities.

Representative Quotes

"My mom helped me a lot. My strength was determination to be a good mother." (R1)

"When I get tired, I think of my child. He or she is my strength." (R8)

Discussion

Social support has been consistently identified as a key protective factor for adolescent mothers. Studies show that family assistance and emotional support can significantly reduce stress and improve psychological adjustment among young mothers (SmithBattle, 2013). In addition, intrinsic motivation and a strong sense of responsibility toward their children often motivate young mothers to overcome challenges and pursue long-term goals (Ellis-Sloan, 2019).

Theme 5: Hopes, Aspirations, and Plans for Educational Continuity

Findings

Despite experiencing significant educational disruption, participants maintained strong aspirations for the future. Many expressed intentions to return to school, enroll in alternative learning programs, pursue vocational training, or start small businesses. Several participants also described specific plans, such as saving money, seeking family assistance for childcare, or enrolling in flexible education programs once their children were older.

Representative Quotes

“I plan to go back to school once my baby is older.” (R1)

“I will study through alternative learning programs.” (R3)

“I plan to enroll in senior high again next year.” (R5)

Discussion

Maintaining educational aspirations is a common resilience pathway among adolescent mothers. Research shows that a strong future orientation and goal-setting mindset can promote psychological well-being and encourage re-engagement with education (SmithBattle, 2013). Flexible learning opportunities and alternative education programs have also been identified as important strategies for helping teenage mothers continue their schooling while balancing parental responsibilities (Yakubu & Salisu, 2018).

CONCLUSION

This study explored the lived experiences of young mothers who transitioned from schooling to early parenthood in Barangay Union, Dapa, Surigao del Norte, Philippines. The findings revealed that early pregnancy significantly disrupted the educational pathways of the participants and exposed them to emotional, social, and economic challenges. Many respondents experienced feelings of fear, shame, and uncertainty when they first discovered their pregnancy, often accompanied by social stigma and negative reactions from their families and communities. These experiences contributed to school discontinuation and financial difficulties, which further complicated their transition into motherhood.

Despite these challenges, the participants demonstrated resilience and adaptability in coping with their new responsibilities. Family support, particularly from parents and grandparents, emerged as a crucial source of emotional and practical assistance. Personal determination, faith, and the desire to provide a better future for their children also served as strong motivational factors that helped young mothers navigate their circumstances. Although their educational journeys were interrupted, many participants-maintained aspirations to continue their studies through alternative learning programs, vocational training, or future re-enrollment in formal schooling.

The findings highlight the importance of creating inclusive and supportive educational environments for adolescent mothers. Schools, communities, and policymakers must work together to provide flexible learning opportunities, counseling services, and social support programs that enable young mothers to continue their education while fulfilling their parental responsibilities. Recognizing the resilience and aspirations of adolescent mothers is essential in developing policies and interventions that promote educational re-engagement and long-term socio-economic stability.

LIMITATIONS

This study focused on a small group of young mothers from a single rural community, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported experiences obtained through interviews, which may be influenced by participants' personal interpretations and recollections. Despite these limitations, the research provides valuable insights into the lived experiences and coping strategies of adolescent mothers transitioning from schooling to early parenthood.

RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study highlight the importance of providing inclusive and flexible educational opportunities for adolescent mothers. Schools may strengthen programs such as alternative learning systems, flexible schedules, and counseling services to support young mothers in continuing their education while managing parental responsibilities. The study also emphasizes the vital role of family and community support in helping young mothers cope with emotional and social challenges associated with early parenthood.

Furthermore, policymakers and educational leaders may consider developing programs that facilitate the educational reintegration of adolescent mothers through financial assistance, childcare support, and awareness initiatives that reduce social stigma. Recognizing the resilience and aspirations of young mothers can guide educators, community leaders, and policymakers in creating supportive programs that promote their educational continuity and long-term well-being.

FUTURE RESEARCH

While this study provides valuable insights into the experiences of young mothers who transitioned from schooling to early parenthood, several areas warrant further investigation. Future studies may expand the scope by including a larger and more diverse sample of adolescent mothers from different regions or socioeconomic backgrounds to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Comparative studies between young mothers who returned to school and those who did not may also provide deeper understanding of the factors that influence educational re-engagement. In addition, future research may explore the perspectives of other stakeholders such as teachers, school administrators, parents, and community leaders regarding the educational support available for adolescent mothers. Investigating the effectiveness of alternative learning systems, flexible school programs, and community-based interventions designed for young parents may also contribute to the development of more responsive educational policies.

Furthermore, longitudinal studies that follow young mothers over time could provide deeper insights into how early parenthood affects their long-term educational attainment, employment opportunities, and overall well-being. Such research would help policymakers, educators, and social institutions design sustainable programs that support adolescent mothers in rebuilding their educational paths and improving their future life prospects.

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