

Teenage Pregnancy: The Hidden Epidemic Amongst Taclobanon Youth Amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Pregnancy is only the beginning of challenges for teenage mothers and their families. Teenage mothers face individual challenges that make it more difficult for them to finish in higher education. This phenomenological study aims to (1) solicit the lived experiences of pregnant teenagers who are still pursuing education in different schools in Tacloban City (2) identify the challenges of pregnant teenagers during the COVID-19 Pandemic, and (3) determine their coping mechanisms. Moreover, the researchers used Purposive Sampling technique in choosing the respondents and used Thematic Analysis in analyzing the data. There is a total of ten (10) selected respondents from the different schools in the city. This study found that *the* pandemic brought a serious mental problem including frustrations, stress, anxiety, and depression in their life. Most of the participants experienced difficulties in concentrating on their studies, they often made absences of their class to take care themselves, and they encountered financial crisis during lockdowns. It is also revealed that most of the respondents claimed that all problems must be face courageously. It is evident from this study that it is important to have coping mechanism like acquiring support to others and face the challenges courageously. There is a need for women to be given the chance to make decisions about their futures on their own as well as have access to appropriate education. Furthermore, a need for their teachers to be aware of their situation so that they do not fall behind in their lessons and activities.

Keywords: Covid-19 Pandemic, Challenges, Coping Mechanism, Teenage Pregnancy

1. Introduction

Many women worldwide consider motherhood as a vital and relevant aspect of their lives, especially in achieving lifelong satisfaction and contentment. For women in communities where motherhood is highly desired, motherhood is considered crucial to the woman's identity and overall wellbeing (Liamputtong et.al., 2015). Mothers reported significantly better subjective well-being and greater life satisfaction than childless women. In fact, a study conducted by Holton et. al. (2010) found that there was no significant difference between the rates of mental health conditions of mothers, including those who had given birth in the preceding year, and childless women. Their data suggested that being a mother is associated with enhanced mental health for women, and challenged the view that the child-bearing years are a period of diminished psychological well-being for women. In exemption, teenage motherhood, which occurs at a critical developmental stage of teenagers' lives, has been identified as having adverse social and health consequences. Globally, teenage pregnancy remains a public health concern. Worldwide, sixteen million girls give birth during adolescence annually with an estimated three million having unsafe abortions (Liamputtong et.al., 2015). Most adolescent pregnancies occur in developing countries, and teenagers living

in socio-economically disadvantaged settings in developed countries are at higher risk of teenage pregnancy as compared to the broader population (Ankomah and Gyesaw, 2013).

In the Philippines, teenage pregnancy affects about 6% of Filipino girls, ranking second highest in Southeast Asia based on Save the Children's Global Childhood Report (2019). An estimated 538 babies are born to Filipino teenage mothers every single day (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2017) and alarmingly, these numbers have grown over 70% in the course of ten years (Ugochi and Daniels, 2012) and continues to grow even today. According to the Fair and Fearless Freeman (2005), there is a continuing rising trend of pregnant young women in the country and most of them are unmarried. Most teenage mothers are unprepared for motherhood and their pregnancies often either end in abortion, adoption, or abandonment. Young women are also more vulnerable to death during pregnancy. United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) country representative said the number of teenage pregnancies in the country is an area of concern to which the agency is giving serious attention.

Lockdowns and other restrictions imposed due to the coronavirus crisis have led to a rise in teenage pregnancies. According to the International Aid Organizations, there is cause for concern and warning of the long-term consequences early pregnancies have on young girls. According to UNICEF, difficulties during pregnancy and childbirth are among the leading causes of death among young women between 15 and 19. School closures is one of the factors for the cause of teenage pregnancy, findings from a Department of Science and Technology - National Research Council of the Philippines (DOSTNRCP) research show. Technology and other virtual platforms have also been used to assist young girls and boys during the pandemic (Willie, 2021). Lack of adequate attention to the health needs of girls and women in crises may lead to devastating consequences such as increased maternal and infant mortality, increased number of unsafe abortions and failure to prevent pregnancy (Larki, Sharifi, Roudsari, 2021).

Pregnancy is only the beginning of challenges for teenage mothers and their families. Teenage mothers face individual challenges that make it more difficult for them to finish in higher education. Many researchers view that a teenage mother's future will be depressing and some challenges will be experienced (Tonelli, 2004). After pregnancy, teenage mothers need to juggle between taking care of a newborn and taking up higher education. Often, teenage mothers, especially those without a partner, drop out of college and resort to part-time or unsatisfying, low-paying jobs to provide for their young. Despite this, working gave women a sense of accomplishment, confidence and some much needed social contact (Wiggins 2005). They often lack qualifications, skills, and experiences to qualify for a minimum wage job. In addition to providing the baby's and her needs, it is also the mother's job and responsibility to provide an acceptable future for the child, at the very least.

With this, the study aims to (1) solicit the lived experiences of pregnant teenagers who are still pursuing education in different schools in Tacloban City (2) identify the challenges of pregnant teenagers during the COVID-19 Pandemic, and (3) determine their coping mechanisms. This will allow the researchers to assess the situations of pregnant teenagers who continues education in the city, and discover and examine coping mechanisms which may benefit them and their families.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Pregnancy

Teenage pregnancy is typically reported among women between thirteen and nineteen years of age. Cherry & Dillon (2018) revealed that in the United States, the vast majority of teenage births occur among girls aged 15-19. However, there were also cases of girls who are already sexually active at an early age of ten and eventually become teenage mothers. This is also the case for the Philippines where teenage mothers belong in the age bracket of 10-19 years old. Data from the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) shows that a total of 180,916 live births were recorded among

adolescents in the said age bracket (Gita-Carlos, 2021). This is for the year 2019 alone when the country has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates among the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries.

For decades, teenage pregnancy remains to be considered a serious social issue given the yearly statistics and its impacts on society. There are a lot of factors that contribute to its continuous prevalence including geographical location, mother's educational attainment, and poverty or social class. According to the 2017 National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS), there are more cases of teenage pregnancy in rural areas (10%) compared to urban areas (7%). This is reflected by a previous report from the 2013 NDHS that shows how early pregnancy is more common in rural areas like Caraga and Cagayan Valley compared to other regions. In terms of educational attainment, the same survey revealed that early pregnancy is observed more among young adult women aged 15-24 who were only able to reach elementary as compared to those with college degrees from the same age group (PSA, 2014). It is safe to assume that limited access to education is closely linked to poverty which is why there are also a higher proportion of teenage mothers coming from less fortunate household communities (37%) compared to wealthier ones (13%). Aside from the aforementioned factors, Mollborn, et al. (2011) also included race and religious influences that contribute to the rise of teenage pregnancy cases all over the globe.

In 2020, a new culprit was linked to the sudden rise of teenage pregnancy cases when lockdowns and other restrictions were imposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is true for Africa and the Philippines where international aid organizations warned citizens about the possible regression in a girl's right to education and wealth once she gets pregnant (Schwikowski, 2021) which is even more intensified by the closure of schools that transitioned to the remote learning set-up. The immediacy of this problem was recognized by incumbent President Rodrigo Duterte when he issued Executive Order No. 141 in June 2021. It seeks to push the implementation of measures that will hopefully address the issue while giving a warning that "the number of adolescent pregnancies are expected to rise, as girls already living in dysfunctional homes spend more time with their households as a result of the [coronavirus disease 2019] pandemic and are thereby more exposed to abuse..." (Gita-Carlos, 2021).

Access to prenatal, maternal, and even family planning services was also limited during the pandemic. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reported that overloaded health systems and disrupted global supply chains could possibly result in the loss of access to contraception which could then lead to an estimate of seven million unintended pregnancies. Unfortunately, Santos (2020) mentioned that similar circumstances could also happen to five million women in the country. Español (2021) stressed that access to these could have helped lessen the cases of early pregnancies which is why according to Pazzibugan (2022), a whole-of-government approach is necessary to finally put an end to this menace.

2.2 Balancing Education and Motherhood

Brown and Amankwaa (2007) mentioned that female college students who get more involved in pre-marital sexual relationships are more likely to get pregnant. In the Philippines, the 2013 National Demographic and Health Survey confirmed that one in five young adult Filipino women aged 18 to 24 were already exposed to sexual activities even before they turn 18. Those who eventually get pregnant before finishing college carry the burden and risk of bearing and raising a child. Whether the pregnancy was planned or not and whether the mother has the support of her partner, the challenges of being a young parent will impact the lives of both the parents and the child. Hofferth et. al (as cited by Brown and Amankwaa, 2007) referred to early pregnancy as a "full-time job" and said that "having a child while being a student becomes stressful because child-rearing consumes time and energy."

Berg & Mamhute (2013) shared a similar perspective and tackled the conflicting roles that a teenage mother might struggle with especially since she is expected to prioritize the needs of her child more than her own needs. Many student mothers may find it a usual thing to feel guilty and inadequate whenever responsibilities from both roles will surface at the same time. Both Kidwell (2004) and Brown & Amankwaa, (2007) agreed with the difficulty of the task but added that it will be easier for the mother if she has someone else to help her in her duties. However, the expectation of receiving support after giving birth, despite having people around the mother still often causes stress that may lead to depression during the postpartum period.

Nevertheless, many student mothers still persevere to continue their studies amidst the difficulties of being young parents. About 10 percent of the population of higher education students are already parents. Student mothers go back to studying with the hope to land a job and provide for their children and give them a better future (Wilsey, 2013). They do not consider having a family at an early age as a hindrance to finishing their degrees but use it as motivation instead. Behind the usual connotation of early pregnancy as a ticket to a broken future, Story (as cited by Brown & Amankwaa, 2007) also reported some positive effects of having parenting responsibilities at an early age. Most student mothers are noticed to be more responsible than regular students and are less likely to drop out of college. Moreover, girls who were irresponsible before pregnancy have become more responsible after they have already given birth to their children.

2.3 Sexual Activity

An increase in the rate of teenage pregnant women worldwide has been observed during the second half of the twenty-first century. Changes in culture and society as well as a more modern environment seem to have paved the way for adolescents to engage in sexual activities at a much younger age. On top of that, the use rate of contraception among their age group is very low given the lack of basic sex education among the youth. Such a situation is very much different from back then when cases of early pregnancy are very rare and marriage was the primary season when women get exposed to sexual relations.

According to Gregorio (2018), young women develop their sense of sexuality through their partners and not in school. Resources like pornography or peers then serve as the initial exposure for young men. Gregorio (2018) also mentioned that adolescents do not have that many options for resources where they can learn sex education because of the culture of conservatism that prevails in society. Women at a young age are not able to know about family planning and pregnancy until they become one. Unfortunately, avoiding discussion about this topic could be one of the reasons for the prevalence of pregnancy among teenagers.

A two-month study of the DOST-NRCP led by Dr. Gloria Luz Nelson revealed that the pandemic is not the direct cause of teenage pregnancy cases over the past couple of years but several mediating factors such as school closures, dysfunctional families, and lack of access to sexual and reproductive health education. Willie (2021) confirmed this and stated that “disruption of schools as a non-pharmaceutical intervention to arrest the pandemic has been depicted as a contributing factor to increased teenage pregnancy rates during the pandemic.”

With the rise of teenage pregnancy cases especially during the pandemic, the significant link between the global prevalence of COVID-19 and the challenges posed by the pandemic to SRH must be considered by policymakers and healthcare providers so they can take the appropriate actions based on the circumstance. Larki et. al (2021) stressed that this is relevant to prevent the devastating consequences of

lack of adequate attention to the health needs of girls and women in crises such as increased maternal and infant mortality, increased number of unsafe abortions, and failure to prevent pregnancy.

D. Impacts of Teenage Pregnancy

According to Plan International, teenage pregnancy is a worldwide problem but the cases are disproportionately prevalent in poorer and marginalized communities. Approximately 90% of births to young women aged 15-19 in developing countries are recorded to occur during early marriage. The problem within these countries that seem to contribute to such alarming cases includes the imbalance of power, lack of access to contraception, and pressure on women to prove their fertility. There is a need for women to be given the chance to make decisions about their bodies and futures on their own as well as have access to appropriate healthcare and education. This is because teenage pregnancy rates seem to rise when women are not aware of their rights and the ways they can preserve their sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing.

Aspects such as parental income and a girl's educational attainment also play a role. The desire to compensate for the loss of a child, a lack of access to information and contraception, and cases of sexual violence are all factors. Amidst the pandemic, Hope Basiao-Abella, adolescent reproductive health project coordinator for Likhaan, a nongovernmental organization that works on women's health and contraception access, shared that "access to birth control has been severely limited, particularly for teenagers, due to the strict lockdown in Manila, which includes limited access to medical facilities, no public transportation, and strict enforcement of no-going-out rules."

The impact of early pregnancy and parenthood extends from the life of the parent to the child, to the people around them, and even to society. "Early childbearing may result in poor health outcomes and may be a threat to the country's economic growth. Pregnant adolescents are less likely to complete higher education and have lesser ability to earn more income over the course of a lifetime, causing economic losses to the country" (National Nutrition Council, 2021). A lot of poor Filipino families are products of early marriages. More so, a significant number of maternal and child deaths recorded by the Department of Health (DOH) are related to teenage pregnancy.

Pregnancy and childbirth complications are the leading causes of death among young women aged 15 to 19. Due to their immature bodies, teenage pregnant women face additional health risks and complications. The National Nutrition Council (2021) shared that "pregnancy during teenage years is also associated with a higher risk of health problems such as preeclampsia, anemia, contracting STDs (sexually transmitted diseases), premature delivery, postpartum hemorrhage, and poor mental health outcomes." They are also at risk of mental illnesses like depression since women are prone to various types of abuse.

Health risks are also observed in babies born to mothers who are younger. "Mothers with poor maternal health are more likely to give birth to a low birth-weight baby, with inadequate complementary feeding and breastfeeding, frequent infections, and inadequate food, health, and care, the low birth-weight baby will grow as a stunted child, a stunted teenager, and finally to a malnourished pregnant woman who, in turn, has another low-birth-weight baby, and the cycle persists through generations. Their body may compete with developing fetuses being carried for nutrition and may not be psychologically ready to nurse babies after delivery since some pregnancy among teenagers is either unintended or unwanted. Lack of knowledge on nutrition can also lead to poor health outcomes" (National Nutrition Council, 2021).

In terms of abortion, adolescents who live in countries where abortion is prohibited or severely restricted are more likely to engage in unsafe abortions, putting their health and lives at risk. Approximately

3.9 million girls aged 15 to 19 who are living in developing countries are subjected to unsafe abortions each year. Pregnancy in adolescent girls can also have negative social and economic consequences for the girls, their families, and their communities. Unmarried pregnant adolescents may face stigma, rejection, and threats of violence from their parents and peers. Girls who become pregnant before the age of 18 are also more likely to be subjected to domestic violence.

Among these studies and literature are common ideals regarding teenage pregnancy and teenage motherhood as a widely prevalent 'epidemic' in itself, especially in the Philippines, affecting the lives of thousands of young girls and their families lives, more especially their education, career paths, future, and over-all well-being.

3. Research Problem

This qualitative phenomenological study aims to explore the lived experiences of pregnant teenagers in Tacloban City. More specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges faced by pregnant teenagers amidst the COVID-19 in Tacloban City?
2. How do they cope up with the situations during this time of crisis?
3. Based on their perceptions, what are the recommended steps to combat the challenges they are experiencing?

4. Theoretical Framework

Teenage pregnancy is one of the most prevalent cases in the world, especially in the Philippines. Being a parent at a very young age can cause enormous problems and lots of stress. While everyone's problem can be drastically different, teenage pregnancy, on the other hand, is a very sensitive and complicated matter. This study is anchored on Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Theory of Development. Erik Erickson (1950) proposed that human development undergoes a series of developmental changes. He hypothesized that each of the stages of psychosocial has its own task of determining the development of a person. In every phase of human development, a person should overcome a certain crisis that should be dealt with and be resolved. The failure to resolve the crisis in a certain stage will result in a potential negative outcome (Maladaptation/Malignancy). For instance, adolescence is in the fifth stage of the theory (Identity vs. Role Confusion), in this stage, adolescents start to explore the world with their peers and groups that might influence them. Life here becomes more demanding since their role in society starts to change as they prepare for more challenges in adulthood. An adolescent need to resolve the crisis in order for him/her to advance to the following developmental stage. Many of the teenagers find it hard to overcome this crisis. Adolescents mark the beginning of exploration that are necessary in understanding themselves (Romer, 2017). Many teenagers are driven with their feelings, usually emotionally unstable and are impulsive with their acts and attribute this as "raging hormones". Hence, because of the unresolved developmental crisis, problems such as teenage pregnancy occur. On the other hand, as an adolescent, or even a teenage mother, uncover their purpose and identity, they become able to ascend to the next stage and move closer to a more stable and secure life.

Another theoretical framework that guided this study was an Opportunity Cost Framework. In an opportunities cost framework, individuals weigh the costs and benefits of a behavior or action, and their assessment of the costs and benefits helps guide their decision in how to act. Fishbein and Ajzen developed a "reasoned action" theory, which states that individuals perceive the severity of an expected outcome. This perception then helps guide the individual's behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen 1975; Ajzen & Fishbein 1980). A behavior, therefore, is the product of an intended action, and the intended action is guided by an individual's attitudes toward the behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein 1980). Applying this theory to teenagers and pregnancy

suggests that teenagers weigh the severity of a pregnancy when they choose to engage in sexual relations. Teenagers, therefore, would perceive the severity of a teenage pregnancy for their future life outcomes, and this perception would help guide a teenager's decision-making process about whether or not to engage in sexual relations, and if engaging in sexual relations, whether or not to use contraception.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design

The researchers used qualitative research, specifically phenomenological research design, which focused on the different perspectives of pregnant teenagers who are currently pursuing education. It is also a collection of individuals' insight and experiences aimed to make sense of a situation or a phenomenon. Merriam et al. (2002), states that this research design uses an inductive strategy, collecting data from interviews, observations, or document analysis. This research was conducted to provide an insight about the challenges faced by the teenage student mothers in the new learning setup.

Leady (2006), explains that qualitative research is based on the belief that first-hand experience provides the most meaningful data. It also believed that qualitative data gives a large volume of quality data from a limited number of people. Furthermore, it is aimed at understanding the world of participants from their frame of reference (Walker, 2000). The data was collected directly from the chosen respondents through a semi-structured interview processed into a short documentary at the end of the study.

5.2 Research Methods After the survey and the respondents were determined, then the researchers asked the participants' permission to conduct a semi-structured interview which was aimed to determine the participants' thoughts, feelings and beliefs on the said topic. The researchers were, then, asked the respondents when they're available to participate in the interview so they can set a schedule. The researchers created an initial questionnaire and conducted a mock interview which determined the effectiveness of the material. The questionnaire was finalized according to the results of the mock testing. On the set schedule, the researchers proceeded to the research locale and was set the environment up for the respondents. After the interview, the researchers transcribed and analyzed the collected data, identified themes and common ground and was able to arrive at a conclusion.

The researcher made a semi-structured interview questionnaire that was used as the main research instrument in gathering the data. This involved both direct questioning using open-ended questions and close-data ones to gather the demographic data of the respondents (Doyle, 2017). The interview questionnaire made by the researcher contained two (2) parts; the first part consists of questions related to the demographic information which includes the name, age, grade\ year level, and address, of the respondents while the second part consists of questions regarding the lived experiences of Pregnant Teenagers amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic. Closed monitoring will be employed to ensure the full cooperation of the participants. All gathered data was transcribed, observed, and analyzed using the data analysis method.

5.3 Data Analysis

The goal for this study was to allow for a deeper and richer understanding of the lived experiences of pregnant young women who are students at the same time in the middle of the COVID-19 crisis. Thus, the main purpose for data analysis is to discover major themes in the data for each individual participant and for the group as a whole. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), this process entails organizing the

data, breaking it into manageable units, coding, synthesizing, and looking for patterns. What Bogdan and Biklen described is similar to the concept of the hermeneutic circle for data interpretation. Patton (2002) defined the hermeneutic circle as “an analytical process aimed at enhancing understanding, [which] offers a particular emphasis in qualitative analysis, namely, relating parts of wholes, and wholes to parts” (p. 497). Also, Thematic analysis is a useful tool for learning about people's perspectives, experiences, and opinions as it examines the meaning patterns in a set of data. (Warren,2020)

The process of data analysis began as the researchers started to collecting data. They read through the data and look for patterns, common ground, challenges, etc. that stood out.

They were then developed a coding system. Following Bogdan and Biklen (2007), this coding system involved the following steps:

1. Searching the data for regularities and patterns as well as for topics the data covered
2. Writing down words and phrases to represent these patterns and topics
3. The aforementioned words/phrases became the coding categories, which were a means to organize the data. After categorizing the data, the researchers looked for beginning themes. “Theme” in the analysis is defined as a statement of meaning that runs through all or most of the interviews, or one in the minority that carries heavy emotional or factual impact (Ely, 1984). Each category was analyzed separately. The researchers were then recorded themes that emerged within and between categories. New impressions were noted and additional categories, was added as they appeared.

5.4 Ethical Consideration

The researchers kept in mind various ethical considerations while the study was being conducted. With this, each participant was asked for his/her permission to voluntarily participate in the conduct of this study. An informed consent letter was explained clearly which highlights the purpose and main objective of the study. In addition, in compliance with the existing Data Privacy Act of 2012 in the country, researchers ensured that all collected data in the interviews, photographs, audio recording, and other participants' information remained and be treated with utmost confidentiality. Furthermore, the researchers are strictly obedient towards practicing respectful gestures and language. The researchers did not engage in any political, social, cultural, spiritual, and emotional debate with the respondents and did not, in any way, belittle, judge or express any negative reactions on the data acquired.

5.5 Research Reflexivity

The researchers were aware of the fact that in conducting this type of study, inclusiveness and respect was taken into consideration. Thus, the researchers expected that by conducting this study, participants were able to fully expressed their ideas, personal opinions, and experiences. As a result, the method of reflexivity is critical for removing and reducing any form of bias. The researchers were very careful to recognized and dismissed these preconceived notions so that the results are not tainted and are purely objective.

6. Results and Discussion

Table 1: *Participant's Profiles*

Participant	Age	Year Level	Address
1	15	Highschool	Cabalawan, Tacloban City
2	19	College	Tacloban City
3	18	Senior High School	Tacloban City
4	19	College	Cabalawan, Tacloban City

5	19	College	Cabalawan, Tacloban City
6	19	Senior High School	Tacloban City
7	16	Senior High School	Brgy. San Jose, Tacloban City
8	19	College	Tacloban City
9	19	College	Tacloban City
10	18	College	Peerless Village, Tacloban City

Using thematic analysis, (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2018), codes are applied to portions of the interview transcripts that represents meanings through the excerpting feature of Dedoose (Andalibi & Flood, 2021; Talanquer, 2014). The codes in the codebook were iteratively updated and renamed as researchers analyze data. To provide a more detailed representation of our findings, we selected two exemplars from the interview transcript. We invited two (2) participants (Participant 4 and Participant 10) for a google meet session and one on one talk to discuss our data interpretation to validate our findings. Aligned with the trustworthiness of the criteria, we utilized interview protocols, codebook, transcription, and member checking to ensure the validity and reliability in our study (Nowell et al., 2017).

Table 2: Challenges faced by pregnant teenagers amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

Theme	Code	Participants	Participant occurrence
Asynchronous Learning	Prefer to study at night time or free time	10	100%
Low academic performance	Schedule conflicts	8	2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10
Mental Health Issues	Unemployment	6	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8
	Depression	3	7, 8, 9

Based on the analysis of the interview data, a total of there (3) codes grouped into three (3) final themes were uncovered. As seen in the table 1, we present how these codes are being clustered into themes, their frequency in the data, and the respective respondents they were excerpted from. According to the respondents, challenges they faced during the COVID-19 pandemic are: 1) Learn Asynchronously, 2) Low Academic Performance, and 3) Mental Health Issues.

2.1 Asynchronous Learning

Based on the gathered data, it is evident that asynchronous learning is well accepted by the respondents. In the context of COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the society, the respondents prefer to study to on the night time because they need to take care of their child and do household chores before answering their academic activities. The COVID-19 pandemic affects their life in a way that they can commit to their household jobs while meeting their school requirements. This theme aligns with the concept of autonomy in STD, as students are given more choices leading to responsibility and autonomy (Martin et. al.). Some of the selected excerpts for theme 1- Learn asynchronously are:

“In today’s situation, example between cooking meals at home throughout the entire day, keeping up on my household duties at the same time attending my online classes and making so many activities in school, there was never enough time.” – (Participant 5, Code: Prefer to study at night time or free time)

“Studying and being pregnant at the same time is really a big responsibility and time management was all important. I have to do mom’s duties at day time and academic at night time, my only free time to study.” – (Participant 9, Code: Prefer to study at night time or free time)

2.2 Low academic performance

Based on the findings, it suggests that one of the hardest during the pandemic, they found it difficult to concentrate on their studies, they often made absences of their class to take care themselves, encountered difficulty in accomplishing academic tasks due to time constrain and limited financial resources, they missed class reporting and or did not do well in the reporting due to a such condition, got a low grades or incomplete which affects their completion of a bachelor degree. Uncertainty of the future comes in their mind during pandemic realizing that they got a low grade, seems like they not just a normal student that only focus on the school works nor they have also priorities just like taking care of themselves to avoid being sick or infected by the virus, doing household chores, priorities medical checkups, doing the role of being a wife and at the same time attending online class and answering the modules. Moreover, most of the respondents stated that there is no enough time in studying because most of their time is just only taking care of their child and pass their module late which results to low grades and worse is incomplete or drop. According to Berg & Mamhute (2013) shared a similar perspective and tackled the conflicting roles that a teenage mother might struggle with especially when she is expected to prioritize the needs of her child more than her own needs. Many mothers and at the same time students may find it usual thing to feel guilty and inadequate whenever responsibilities from both roles will surface at the same time. Some of the selected excerpts for theme 2- Low academic performance are: *"I've got INC and dropped some subjects in school because I don't have enough time to attend our class. I am so depressed that time, I almost cried every night."* - (Participant 5, code: Schedule conflicts) *"Having a low grade, I cannot overcome it but I accept the fact that I am not a normal student that can all do the things all the time in school."* - (Participant 7, code: Schedule conflicts)

2.3 Mental Health Issues

On the third theme, this implies that the COVID-19 pandemic has a serious of implication on the mental health of the respondents. Result shows that the pandemic brought a serious mental problems including frustrations, stress, anxiety, and depression. This phenomenon opens the mind of the respondents on how hard and tough on becoming a mother. It realized them the difference between the life of a normal student compared to a life with a child. In addition, factors that brought them stress is due to their financial stability, on where they could get money to buy essential things like milk, diapers, food, and other necessities especially during the lockdowns were most of the people lost their job and source of income as the establishments forces to close. Some of the selected excerpts for theme 3- Mental health issues are:

"When my husband lost his job because of the pandemic, and ran out of savings. I do not know how can we survive, so what I did was I sell online since there was a group chat in our subdivision, so I could sell." - (Participant 4, coding: unemployment)

"I also experienced Depression where I always cried every night. I always overthink, anxiety attacks and it's very hard to manage my time because aside from being a mother and a child, I am also a wife, I also take care of my husband." - (Participant 5, code: Depression)

Table 3: Coping mechanisms during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Theme	Code	Participants	Participant Occurrence
Asking Support	Family Support and get instant feedback	4	4, 5, 9, 10
	Sense of Faith	10	100%

Based on the analysis of the interview data, a total of two (3) codes with one (1) final theme were uncovered. As seen in the table 3 above, we present how these codes are being clustered into themes, their frequency in the data, and the respective respondents they were excerpted from. According to the respondents, their coping mechanisms during the COVID-19 pandemic is Acquire Support.

3.1 Asking Support

The theme implies that the various support mechanisms available during this time of uncertainty are very vital to sustaining the motivation of the respondents. Acknowledging the adverse effects on students' psychological well-being during COVID-19, various academic institutions have instituted online support services, including library resources, counseling services, and academic consultation sessions (Sahu, 2020; Son et. al., 2020). The limited time they spend on campus will render access to these support difficult as student and at the same time bearing a child. Some students, directly messaging their teachers to ask for clarifications related to academic was useful. Meanwhile, most of the respondents acquire supports from their family especially in taking care of their modules. Some tend to let their parents answer their modules, buy essential things for them like medicines and milk, and accompanied them during medical checkups.

Meanwhile, most of the respondents claimed that all problems must be face courageously. Respondent 2 and 6 stated that we should believe in ourselves to boost confidence to strive harder in life. Meanwhile, respondent 4,5,8,9, and 10 eloquently stated that in order to face and solve challenges in this time pandemic, faith in God and enough strength is the key. However, respondents 1 and 4 said that problems must be open and shared to their parents. Wherein if the problems grow, it will be avoided and find a solution. Also, to show them the eagerness to strive harder in life. Respondent 3, if she can't handle all her struggles, she would take time to rest, sleep, and thinks for solution for their problems. Finally, respondent 7, stated that seeing herself taking care of her baby, she realized that she need to accept the fact that she is living a new life compared before. Some of the selected excerpts for theme 1- acquire support is:

"Bilang nanay ka kahit bata ka, kailangan parin pala ng magulang. Kailangan mo sila for guidance at sandalan kapag di mo na kaya at sasabihin nila sa akin na 'wag tumigil Margaret at magsipag para sa iyong anak'." – (Participant 1, code: Family Support and get instant feedback)

"I cope up by fighting with this challenges because we cannot go back in the past. All I can do is to strive harder every single day for myself and for my baby." – (Participant 6, code: Sense of faith)

Table 4: Recommended steps to combat the challenges they are experiencing

Theme	Code	Participant	Frequency
Optimistic Mindset	Be responsible	10	100%
	Do not rush things	10	100%

Based on the analysis of the interview data, a total of two (2) codes grouped into one (1) final themes were uncovered. As seen in the table 4 above, we present how these codes are being clustered into themes, their frequency in the data, and the respective respondents they were excerpted from. According to the respondents, the recommended steps to combat the challenges they are experiencing is: Optimistic Mindset

4.1 Optimistic mindset

Our last theme implies that being strong and having positive mindset during COVID-19 pandemic helped most of the respondents to arrive in the current situation, upon struggling to such circumstances that have yet to face. Striving hard, pray and believing once self will lead to a positive thinking. Based on the data shown, the respondents advised teenage mothers have a clear goal in their respective lives. They should think positively and keep going despite their own personal struggles furthermore, they should be discerning in looking for a partner in the future who is ready to take the risk and share equal responsibilities as good parents.

Furthermore, respondents advised that teenage moms should learn to prioritize more important things like their studies. Do not rush things because everything has perfect time. They should be able to value the

importance of education and work harder. The respondents further advised that teenage mothers should be goal oriented. They should focus on more important things. It is a must that they should strive harder, trust themselves and to possess perseverance in order to pursue their dreams and be able to achieve it. Some of the selected excerpts for theme 1: Optimistic mindset *"Do not waste your time spending with your bf/gf, study well and do not disobey your parent's reminder."* - (Respondent 6, code: Be responsible)

"Never degrade yourself, as a mother especially those who are alike me (teenage mom), continue to dream, pursue the things you want to aim, being a mother at young age is not a hinder to stop you from dreaming. We have our own way to take." - (Participant 9, code: never rush things)

"Take your time because it is not easy to have your own family. Finish your studies first and look for a better partner." - (Participant 3, code: Do not rush things)

7. Conclusion

Based on the literature review and the studies discussed, as well as the summary of findings, it can be concluded that the lived experiences of pregnant teenagers in pursuing education and determining their coping mechanisms amidst the COVID-19 pandemic health crisis can be categorized into different themes, and that teenaged mothers have been developed into mature and responsible adults as they prepare to become parents. They've realized that finishing their education is critical for personal growth and a better quality of life with their child, despite the challenges they have in balancing time spent caring for the child with time spent studying. As a result, young mothers in this study are vulnerable in an educational context that expects them to be competent in order to achieve their full potential.

The results of the study show that the experiences of teenage mother's amidst COVID-19 pandemic was reaching their goals through pursuing education. Being a mother, they encountered a lot of circumstances that hinders to their success, but fortunately a strong faith by them can cure the anxiety they are struggling right now. At some point they realized that is needed to be a responsible mother for the sake of their child to get the future they deserve.

It is evident from this study that it is important to have coping mechanism like acquiring support to others and face the challenges courageously. There is a need for women to be given the chance to make decisions about their futures on their own as well as have access to appropriate education. Also, a need for their teachers to be aware of their situation so that they do not fall behind in their lessons and activities. The impact of early pregnancy and parenthood extends from the life of the parent to the child, to the people around them, and even to society. They do not consider having a family at an early age as a hindrance to finishing their degrees but use it as motivation instead. Nevertheless, many student mothers still persevere to continue their studies amidst the difficulties of being young parents.

8. Recommendations

In the context of COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines, it is strongly recommended to enact the Teenage Pregnancy Act and appropriate implementing rules and regulations that would control the rise of teenage pregnancy in the country. The nice way is the programs and policies to make teens stay in school, so that through education they improve their potential and create wiser decisions to break away from poverty.

Considering the teenage mothers' lived experiences that they're going through especially in the height of this COVID-19 pandemic some of the recommendations is that education sectors must ensures to create opportunities for continued education and employment to accommodate and help make up for the educational and career opportunities lost due to these early teenage pregnancies as well as incorporate and

integrate teenage motherhoods in educational situations most importantly in establishing curriculum as well as school policies.

Considering how dangerous it is for young girls to get pregnant, the government must address why and how this phenomenon keeps on happening even though the case of teenage pregnancy in the Philippines already decreasing. This issue should be placed on the country's priorities to be taken care of. The government must conduct safety measures to intervene to this national problem to protect young girls of getting pregnant early. Meanwhile, School institutions have the capacity to address this problem faced by the youth. They must establish a comprehensive sexual education; this will aim to provide awareness of the youth towards their sexuality. Additionally, this will become a way to clear the misconceptions they used to know. Schools should support these pregnant teens to develop a high self-esteem and be of any support to them in their overall aspect. They must implement different activities to strengthen their character and develop their utmost potential in order to prevent teenage pregnancy from occurring.

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