
“TATAY NA SI TOTOY”: Lived Experiences of Teenage Fatherhood

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Abstract: Teenage parenthood is a serious problem in the Philippines. POPCOM reported that there is an alarming increase of teenage pregnancy and the age range gets lower. However, there is a rarity of studies on teenage fathers relative to research on teen mothers. Phenomenological approach was used in the study. Hence, this research aimed to explore and describe the experiences of teenage fathers. Specifically, it sought to describe the lived experiences of teenage fatherhood and determine the challenges encountered by teenage father in all aspects of fatherhood. The study utilized a purposive selection of the seven participants (n=7). The participants underwent a one-on-one in-depth interview. Transcription, coding, and thematic analysis were employed to arrive at the insightful narration of their lived experiences as teenage fathers. Based on the data gathered, different emotions change on behavior and lifestyle, challenging and stressful but rewarding, commitment and plan for the future, family support as coping, and regrets and disappointments were the themes that emerged. The results provide that educators, guidance advocates and guidance counselors develop an intervention program that further understand in helping students handle strong emotions, creation of school policy in helping teenage fathers who face in the difficult situation to give them the opportunity to finish their study despite of their mishap, improving access to adolescent and youth-friendly services and intensification of sex education by integrating it to the curriculum and strengthening parental skills for adolescents and youth. Parents and families play an important role as health educators and are an important influence on young people's attitudes and behaviors, as well as on their overall health and well-being.

Keywords: teenage father, fatherhood, teenage pregnancy, phenomenological approach, Philippines.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Philippines' population now is more than 110 million, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). There was an increase of 1.35% from previous year. More than 53 million are below 25 years of age, including 10.3 million adolescent girls (10-19 years old).

The Philippines has one of the highest adolescent birth rates among the ASEAN Member States. Recent World Bank data shows that the Philippines has 47 births annually per 1,000 women aged 15-19, higher than the average adolescent birth rates of 44 globally and 33.5 in the ASEAN region.

Teen parenthood is a serious problem in the country. In fact, POPCOM reported that there is an alarming increase of teenage pregnancy and the age range gets lower and lower. However,

there is a rarity of studies on teen fathers relative to research on teen mothers because the focus of teen parenthood has been on teen mothers with the exclusion of teen fathers.

In many literature and studies, teenage male has been ignored in adolescent pregnancy since teenage pregnancy and childbearing has traditionally been viewed as a female issue. Consequently, little is known about teen fatherhood which is likely to be studied because unlike teen mothers; they can deny paternity making them less in numbers. Nevertheless, research has demonstrated that boys exposed to a number of risk factors have an increased probability of fathering a child during their teenage years. There are many factors against their favor since most interventions for pregnancy prevention focus on girls and teenage mothers.

The risk factors associated with teen fatherhood are similar to those associated with teen motherhood. Teen fathers face many problems before and after they father a child. According to Chideya and Williams (2014), coming from low socio-economic background mostly resulted in becoming teen fathers. It may also lead to their being unable to support their children financially. It is evident that teen fathers tend to complete fewer grades and that poor educational attainment results in unemployment, which lead to high levels of stress of having to support a child when they do not have work.

The personal needs of teen fathers and the impact of fatherhood on their lives are under-researched as teen fathers are said to be hard to identify, contact, and recruit to participate in research. Thus, researchers investigate the role of teen fathers through the eyes of the teen mothers. As a consequence, the lived experiences of teenage fatherhood and their perceptions as fathers have not been investigated in-depth which makes them voiceless and invisible. There are still gaps in knowledge that could be filled through new research on teen fathers. Thus, this motivates the researcher to conduct the study to explore the experiences of teenage fatherhood. It is essential that the experiences of teen fathers be understood as this knowledge could be used in creating appropriate support programs or measures for teen fathers.

Purpose of the research

The main purpose of the study was to explore and describe the experiences of teenage fathers. Specifically, it sought to describe the lived experiences of teenage fatherhood and determine the challenges encountered by teenage father in all aspects of fatherhood.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study used the phenomenological approach, which focused on exploring the lived experiences of the teenage fathers and issues and concerns that they are facing. Phenomenological research is a qualitative research method used by researchers to find essence (meaning) on the experiences of people who experienced a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Researcher using this approach focuses on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon. The study constitutes three phases of research procedure summarized in the following processes:

Phase 1: Preparation

The researcher had a discussion in determining the research topic that is deemed significant due to increase of teenage pregnancy during this pandemic. It is followed by the discussion on what particular objectives are suited to achieve the relevance and purpose of the research. Target participants were identified followed by the formulation of guide questions for interview. The questions for the interview were content validated by an expert. The researcher also secured the consent of the participants and was made clear to them that all information that will be gathered in the study will be treated with utmost confidentiality and anonymity and

that anytime they can withdraw their consent from participating in the study. The participants were also informed that they will be followed up to gather additional data when needed of clarification.

Phase 2: Interview

The mode of communication for interview with the participants is through the “*Facebook messenger*”, phone, and face to face interview to other participants who were just near in distance and no internet access for online interview. In doing face to face interview, safety health protocols were followed.

The interviews began when the participants felt ready. The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with the teenage fathers. All were explained on the purpose of the study and the eligibility criteria. To protect the identity of the teenage fathers, the interviewer contacted them privately. The interviewer scheduled interviews with each potential participant. The teenage fathers informed that participation is voluntary and that they could withdraw, if they wished to do so, at any time during the interview.

All interviews were conducted at their convenience. The interviewer used the local language, Tagalog to explore their initial reaction to becoming a father and their lived experiences.

Phase 3: Post data analysis

The qualitative data gathered from the participants were analyzed through coding and thematizing of their experiences and challenges encountered as teenage fathers.

Participants of the study

There were seven (7) participants who participated in this study. Participants of this study were chosen based on the following criteria: (a) 15-19 years old Filipino father with pregnant partner or already have a baby or child, (b) studying, working or just at home, (c) voluntary and willing to participate in the research.

Research instruments

A semi-structured interview guide was used to collect the data needed for the study. The questions will be based on the researcher’s careful and thorough review of the literature as well as his thoughts. It is composed of eight (8) questions, some of which have follow-up or probe questions which will be crafted in a way that the participants would be able to spontaneously tell stories about themselves and their lived experiences and issues and concerns as teenage fathers.

Data analysis

The recorded interviews were individually transcribed to come up with an extended text and underwent verbatim transcription. Cool and warm analyses were used in the treatment of field data. The cool analysis part consists of the identification of the significant statements or verbalizations of each participant. These statements serve as basis in the conduct of the warm analysis stage where data categories relevant to the experienced phenomenon were formulated. Themes were formed from the highlighted terms using manual clustering and categorizing.

Ethical consideration

The researchers sought the consent of the participants through an inform consent form stating the details of the study including how the data will be gathered through their approval. All teenage fathers who are 18-19 years old at the time of the interview even though they

fathered a child at between 15-17 years, therefore, they will sign their informed consent. But below 18 years old, their parent or guardian signed the consent. Recording of the interview was also asked for permission from the participants.

In addition, participants were assured of the confidentiality of their identity as well as the data that will be gathered in the study. Furthermore, the participants' safety is prioritized and assured that no harm will be inflicted to them as they participate in the study and that they can freely withdraw their consent to participate anytime they prefer to do so. Conflict of interest is avoided in the whole study process. The research is not funded by any organizations and is purely conducted for the interest of exploring and understanding the experiences and challenges faced by teenage fathers.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Seven participants were part of this study. Table 1 contains the necessary information about the participants.

Table 1: Participants' information

Participant	Present Age	Age when fathered
P1	16	15
P2	19	18
P3	16	18
P4	19	18
P5	19	16
P6	18	16
P7	19	17

The emotions of being a teenage father

Teenage fathers were having mixed emotions upon knowing that they will become a father at an early age. Most of them experienced unfavorable reactions such as shock, surprise, stress, fear, nervous, denial, and upset of the consequence they have done. Most reactions were characterized initially by shock because it was an unplanned event. Scared was their first thought on how they are going to explain and tell to their parents on both sides. They were not ready for fatherhood.

“I was surprised and the same time shocked that I will become a father. I am worried on how I am going to tell my parents. What if they will drive me away from the house if they would learn about it” (P1)

“I was just 16 that time and I was shocked and at first I don't want to accept that I will become a father.” (P5)

“I was shocked and scared after knowing that my girlfriend is pregnant and it was unplanned and I am not yet ready to become a father at my age.” (P6)

Most have the thought on how to take the responsibility and feared that they could not afford it financially.

“I was scared that time when her parents knew that she was pregnant. She was just fifteen years old that time and I am sixteen. One time my dad and I were called to the barangay because the parent of my girlfriend complained. They accused me of rape and they told me how I could raise the child since I was just a student but I defended myself that it was not rape and I will take the responsibility. Her daughter and I love each other and we were together since we were in grade 8. (P3)

“My first reaction when I knew I will become a father at my young age, I felt nervous, scared, and I don’t know what to do with all I have done. But I have to decide to continue becoming a father at my young age because I made all of this and I don’t want the girl suffer and hurt because of me, I want to continue become a father to my baby because the baby didn’t do anything wrong and he is big blessing to us. And for me, if others don’t like it, then let them. My happiness is my choice and is not about pleasing everybody. (P7)

Change in behavior and lifestyle

Teenage fathers reported personal changes that were brought about by becoming a father. All participants stated that becoming a father and having a family at an early age was not part of their plans and it was not easy. However, their behavior and lifestyle changed significantly and positively. There was an abrupt transition of their feelings and role. They become more matured and responsible. All of them were hands-on in raising of their children even though some of them were working and studying.

“I was always out of the house with my friends. I used to go home late. There were even times I go home in the morning, and sometimes it would take me days before going home. But now, I always stay in the house, taking care of my child.” (P1)

“Before I used to have vices; drinking and smoking with my friends and when I became a father, I changed. Also, before I used to spend money on things that I want, but I changed. I now spend my money for my child’s needs. My baby really changed me, my life” (P3)

“Before, my focus was to my parents and siblings. My plan is to help them. I want to build them house and I want to help my siblings finish their studies but it changed. My focus now is to my family because I already have my own family.” (P4)

“Many changes in my behavior and in my lifestyle when I realized that my family is more important than anything.” (P7)

Indeed, family really changed a person especially when it comes to children. Family matters and has a big impact on the behavior and maturity of a person. The transition from a boy to a father influenced them to be more mature and responsible person. It gives them the direction because they think of becoming a good father for their children.

Challenging and stressful but rewarding

Having a family is big responsibility. It needs so much time. One needs to have a job to sustain the needs of the family. As a father, he has the basic responsibility as the head of the family. Some families do not succeed and become broken because the parents are not ready to have a family. There are a lot of challenges to encounter. Certainly, being a father is really tiring especially when you are not ready and young. Sometimes to be a good father, you have to have a lot of observation and experience. In short, you must be ripened for you to know all the things needed to be a father.

“Raising a child is very hard and challenging. Before, I sleep for long hours but now, I need to wake up early or sometimes in the middle of the night to give milk to my child and to change the diaper. It is very hard. I feel stressed especially that

I am still studying and working. That is why I chose modular learning so I could still work and study because I want to finish my studies” (P3)

“Because of my responsibility, I have to stop first my schooling. I need to work to give the needs of my baby.” (P5)

“Being a father at my young age was so hard because I am still studying and I cannot find a job to give financial support to my child. There was a time that I stopped from studying to find a job to support my family and that challenge me much because I want to become a better father to my child to give all she needs.”(P7)

Some of the participants had a positive side despite of their hardships being a teenage father. According to them, seeing their baby smiling, it made them happy and stress free. It felt rewarding to them. Their baby became their source of strength and happiness.

“I am happy every time I see my baby smiling at me after I came home from work. I am hands-on in taking care of my baby. But before, it was two months that I was not able to see my baby because I was prohibited by the parents of my girlfriend until they allowed me and accepted me. As of now I am living togetherwith my partner’s family. (P3)

Commitment and plan for future

Some teenage father participants were students and some were working. All of them were still in the custody of the parents; their own parents and or the parents of their partner. Upon accepting their new responsibilities as teenage fathers, these participants became more determined to complete their studies. They all wanted to graduate and work as soon as possible. They tried to pay more attention to their studies and to provide for their new families.

“I want to finish my grade 12 first then I will find a job that could support mychild and my family. As of now it is very hard to balance my studies and workat the same time taking care of my baby. My partner is helping me answeringmy modules.” (P2)

“My focus now is the future of my child. I don’t want her to experience what I have experienced. That is why I work hard for our future.” (P4)

“I am planning to finish my studies ang my goal is to become a police officerbut I set aside it first because I have to work for my family.” (P5)

“Yes, I want to be a policeman, but for now I will prioritize first my family.”(P6)

“My goal is to finish my studies and find a job so that I can support my familyand give all they need.” (P7)

In the journal written by Hard castle, (2017), Teen Fatherhood-Rights and Responsibilities of being a Teen Dad, stated that if you are a father, you have the right to know your child and to participate in your child’s life. You have the responsibility to financially and emotionally care for your child. You have a responsibility to be present in your child’s life and ensure that your child’s needs are met. You have the responsibility to ensure that your child is safe and well caredfor and is free from harm. You have the responsibility to make decisions that are in the best interest of your child. Being a father is simply a life-long commitment.

Family support as coping

Family support is very important especially in times of challenging times. Family is a placeof refuge and security. As teenage father, one would be likely to experience negative thoughts. And it could affect their physical and mental health as well. Family's social support is one of themain ways that family positively impacts health. Social relationships, such as those found in close families, have been demonstrated to decrease the likelihood of the onset of many kinds of diseases.

“At first, my parents were very mad at me because how can I raise my child giventhat I am only sixteen years old and still studying. But then they accepted me andmy child. They were

then happy seeing my baby.” (P1)

“The family of my partner was very acceptable and understanding. The time when they know that I impregnated their daughter, of course they were shocked first but then, they still accepted and support us.” (P4)

It was apparent that the teen fathers in the study recognized the importance of support and turned to their parents for help. They recalled being appreciative of their parents’ support as they helped them to prepare for their responsibilities as a teenage father. The family was of great importance as a source of all types of support, including emotional, physical, material, financial and informational. This finding is consistent with Chideya & Williams (2013) and Angley et al.(2015), both of which studies found that family support was essential for coping with the transition to fatherhood.

“Yes, it was very hard. I am thankful that my family did not abandon me after knowing that I am a father. They still continue supporting me. My partner is close with my mom and we are always on her store to help.” (P6)

For most teenage fathers, acceptance came after their parents were notified about the pregnancy either by the teenage fathers. Family support has a big role in uplifting the morale of their children. Vast understanding from the parents is what the teenage father needs after their wrongdoings. Sometimes, there are some parents who have the hard time accepting their children’s actions. In this case, they become more rebellious and no more directions in life. Indeed, during this trying time of their children, the parents are their shoulders to lean on.

The feeling of regrets and disappointment

Having a family is not a joke. As an old saying goes *“Ang pag-aasawa ay hindi parang kanin na isusubo na iluluwa kapag napaso”* (Marriage is not like a rice that you swallow and take it out when you get burnt). Regret is always at the end. This is a reminder that in everything you do, you need to think it many times before doing or deciding. Just like in having a child,

“Ah...I regretted on what I have done. I still have many goals and plans. I want to finish my studies, but I have no choice but to face the reality and accept what had happened. I love my baby and my girlfriend.” (P3)

“I have regrets especially when I recall my experiences during the time when my girlfriend was in the stage of pregnancy. It was so hard as if I don’t want to go back.” (P4)

“For me, there is a disappointment on my part because I want to finish first my studies so when I have my own child, there is something that I could be proud of.” (P6)

“I felt disappointed about myself. I want to tell those teenage boys out there to finish their study first and have a nice/good job so that they won’t suffer a lot of problems later on. Think first before you move to become a father. Think for the future of your family and to your child also.” (P7)

The narration of the respondent implies on the regrets and disappointment of teenage fathers about what happened to them. In fact, most of them have plans to finish their studies so that they can support their family. In addition, if they just turn back the time, they do not want to do it for they really experience hardships. They cannot enjoy anymore. There are a lot of responsibilities. They cannot do things which they used to do. And if given the chance, some would tell that they make things right of all their decisions. However, they now accepted of what they are now and happy of being a father for their child is the best gift they have ever received.

4. CONCLUSION

The study used the phenomenological approach to explore and describe the experiences of teenage fathers as well as the challenges they have encountered.

Teenage fathers evoked different emotions upon knowing that they will become a father at an early age. Most of them experienced unfavorable reactions such as shock, surprise, stress, fear, nervous, denial, and upset of the consequence they have done. Due to unplanned pregnancy of their partners, most of the teenage fathers had an initial reaction of being scared and shocked. They were afraid of the consequences of their actions such as how to tell their parents, what will happen to their plans and goals, what would others say about them and how are they going to raise and support their own family. They were not ready for fatherhood.

Being a teenage father changed them. There was an abrupt change of their behavior and lifestyle. Things that they used to do before were also changed like being engaged to vices. They became more matured and responsible. It gives them the direction because they think of becoming a good father for their children.

Father as the head of the family has the basic responsibility of taking care of the family. There are a lot of challenges to encounter. Certainly, being a father is really tiring especially when you are not ready and young. One should be matured enough before engaging to fatherhood stage and must endure all the hardships. However, some participants had a positive side despite of their hardships being a teenage father. According to them, seeing their baby smiling, it made them happy and stress free. It felt rewarding to them. Their baby became their source of strength and happiness.

Teenage fathers have commitment and plan for the future of their child and family. Upon accepting their new responsibilities, they became more determined to complete their studies. They all wanted to graduate and work as soon as possible. They tried to pay more attention to their studies and to provide for their new families.

Teenage fathers recognized the importance of support system especially their parents. They recalled being appreciative of their parents' support as they helped them to prepare for their responsibilities as a teenage father. The family was of great importance as a source of all types of support, including emotional, physical, material, financial and informational. Family support was essential for coping with the transition to fatherhood.

Teenage fathers have the feeling of regrets and disappointment. Having a family at an early age is stressful. It is not a joke. Maturity, well-prepared and ready if one wants to have a family so you would not be regretted at the end. It needs to have a wise decision making before engaging to have a family of your own.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is the hope that this study will be a useful contribution to the existing academic literature on teenage fatherhood. Based on the conclusions drawn, the following points need to consider:

Educators, guidance advocates and guidance counselors may develop an intervention program that further understand in helping students handle strong emotions caused by confusion and curiosity to stay away from doing experiments with alcohol, sex and drugs.

Creation of school policy in helping teenage fathers who face in the difficult situation to give them the opportunity to finish their study despite of their mishap.

Improving access to adolescent and youth-friendly services and intensification of sex education by integrating it to the curriculum.

Strengthening parental skills for adolescents and youth. Parents and families play an important role as health educators and are an important influence on young people's attitudes and behaviors, as well as on their overall health and well-being.

Used this study as baseline to raise awareness for policymakers and to guide them in enacting policy that meets the needs of these first-time teenage fathers.

Future researchers may conduct a follow-up study on teenage student fathers after college and their career aspirations.

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