

THE STORIES OF FILIPINO PREGNANT TEENAGERS AND TEENAGE MOTHERS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC CRISIS

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ABSTRACT

This article was the result of the screen mediated in-depth interviews conducted via Facebook Messenger to 18 youths, 16 to 20 years old who are 28 percent pregnant, 61 percent mother and 11 percent were both pregnant and mother during the COVID-19 pandemic who was on community quarantine that started in March 2020. The purpose is to learn the meanings of the youth on their experiences based on their circumstances, as pregnant, as mothers, and as pregnant mothers during the pandemic to enable the government to plan and implement well-structured and integrated development programs and policies that are relevant to address the needs of the early pregnancies among Filipino youth. The youth's social economic and behavioral characteristics were described based on these circumstances they had during the pandemic. From their stories, three dominant themes emerged. Those in a broken relationship living with parents, those living with partners living either with their own family or the family of the partners' union, and those that are married living in their own homes. Results show that the youth never use contraceptives and therefore their pregnancies are unplanned or accidental but their babies are never unwanted. Youths receive their financial and social support from the partner and relatives. The majority (78%) had dropped out of school however, most of those who dropped out, 61 percent of them plan to continue their studies to provide for a better future for their unborn and newly born babies. The majority of the youth received prenatal care and observed health safety protocols to prevent infection from COVID-19. Despite the many burdens that the youth are experiencing like lack of stable income, being either in an unstable or broken relationship, low educational attainment, and not homeowners. The young mothers and mothers to be the study are aware of the consequences of the pandemic to their well-being of their children. But amidst the pandemic crisis, the majority of the youth in the study revealed from their stories that their children are blessings and at the same time are optimistic and full of hope for a better life.

Keywords: Filipino Teenagers, COVID-19 Pandemic, Teenage Pregnancy, Teenage Mothers

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The social, economic and behavioral characteristics of the subjects were described according to the circumstances they had during the pandemic such as whether they are **pregnant**, **mother**, and **pregnant and mother** at the same time. The assumption is that the characteristics of the teens is defined by the circumstances they are in during the pandemic. The subjects come from nine provinces and seven regions in the Philippines. The mean age of the subjects that were interviewed is 18 years old and majority of them

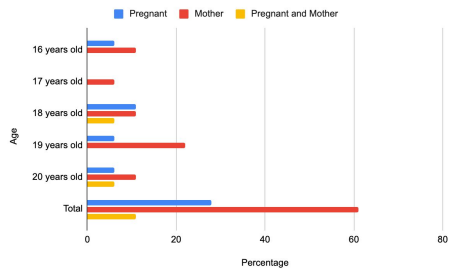
are unmarried and living either with their parents or partner's households. From no income to low income mainly from the daily wages of their partners, the teens in the study are finding it hard to buy food with some admitting they experience hunger not only during the pandemic but even before the pandemic. Nonetheless, the teens are generally happy with their pregnancy and perceive their child as a blessing. Some teens felt nervous and fearful mainly because it is their first time to experience giving birth. The pandemic times require behavior modification. In the case of the teens the pandemic is not only a reason to modify their behaviors but more so their everyday life has changed for they found themselves pregnant or a young mother. Aside from health risks, teens faced other difficulties during the pandemic due to restricted movements. The stories of the participants gathered through screen-mediated in-depth interviews, provided "rich and thick descriptions" of the experiences of the pregnant youth and young mothers in this difficult pandemic crisis.

Three major themes emerged from their narratives:

- 1 Teens who face the burden of being solo parents at a very young age and may be more likely to be stigmatized, dependency on their parents is indefinite.
- 2 Teens in a consensual union, enjoys the support of their partners and relatives for now, but face the burden is low income and unstable income.
- 3 Teens in a in a stable relationship, but face the burden of lack of sufficient education.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology is qualitative narrative inquiry. The method used to gather data is screen-mediated interviews using the chat mode of Facebook Messenger. Before the recruitment of the subjects, the interview guide was constructed to include probing questions. A pilot test was done before the actual interview. The researchers' conduct was guided by ethical issues related to informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity, and by the principles of data management throughout the project. Bracketing or reflexivity assisted the researcher to develop a non-judgmental and objective attitude towards the information shared by the participants.



Majority had dropped out from school, but most of those who dropped out plan to continue their studies to provide a better future for their unborn and newborn babies. Amidst the pandemic crisis, the majority of the youth in the study revealed from their stories that their **children are blessings** and at the same time are **optimistic and full of hope for a better life**.