

COURAGE: THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF TEENAGE MOTHERS OF INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

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ABSTRACT

The teenage years, often seen as a time of intense emotions and change, are essential for self-discovery and laying the foundation for future success, encompassing critical brain development, identity formation and social skills. Despite being romanticized as a period of limitless possibilities, this stage can be disrupted by unexpected events like pregnancy for some women, which demand significant and major adjustments. Teenage mothers often struggle with social acceptance, finding it challenging to maintain existing friendships or form new ones due to time constraints and societal judgment, which can aggravate mental health issues such as loneliness. Seeking support from family, friends, engaging in self-care, or joining support groups becomes crucial for their well-being. This research investigates into the intricate web of consequences associated with teenage pregnancy in social integration in school, peer connections, socialization, discrimination, and coping mechanisms of adolescent mother students at the International School of Asia and the Pacific. This research utilized qualitative research method looking to the phenomenology of teenage mothers students of International School of Asia and the Pacific. Ten (10) conversational partners participated in this study. The results unveil 7 emergent themes upon analyzing the data. The emergent themes are: Crucial Changes, Ostracism, Unequal Paths, Relentless Tenacity, Adaptive Coping Mechanism, Growth, and Evolving Together which then show the central theme "COURAGE".

Key words: *Coping Mechanism, International School of Asia and the Pacific, Interpersonal Relationship, Teenage Mothers, School Inclusion, Stigma*

INTRODUCTION

The teenage years, typically portrayed as a turbulent sea of hormones and emotions, plays a unique and crucial role in human development. This period, while definitely difficult, serves as an arena for self-discovery and provides the groundwork for a successful life. Adolescent brain development, notably in decision-making, impulse control, and risk evaluation, lays the framework for future cognitive

capacities and emotional management. Furthermore, when individuals begin to question society norms and build their own distinct identities via study of values, interests, and ideas, this stage acts as a turning point for identity development. This process, while filled with uncertainty and unease at times, is critical for the development of self-awareness and confidence.

In addition, teenage years allows for social exploration, as individuals form strong social attachments, learn about relationships, and negotiate complex social dynamics. This process promotes the development of communication skills, empathy, and a knowledge of social cues, all of which are necessary for later-life lasting connections. The teenage years also indicates a dramatic transition toward a sense of autonomy and independence. Individuals improve their ability to make decisions, solve issues, and accept responsibility as they navigate the world with increased independence, preparing them for the obstacles and possibilities of adulthood.

A teenager's life takes numerous unforeseen detours that shape and influence how they live throughout adulthood. During their adolescence, they achieve various milestones that will be significant throughout their lives. They start high school, get their driver's license, go on their first date, go to prom, graduate from high school, and start college. This is also the time when the majority of them start experimenting with drugs and alcohol, as well as having sex.

The teenage years, a phase of fast physical, cognitive, and social transformation, is frequently romanticized as a time of limitless possibility and self-discovery. On the other hand, for some young women, the unexpected arrival of pregnancy disrupts this important stage. This life-changing occurrence sends them down an unexpected route, one loaded with difficulties and requiring urgent and major changes.

Teenage pregnancy remains a major social problem in the Philippines, with serious repercussions. While the country's adolescent pregnancy rate has decreased in recent years, the statistics remain worrying. According to the 2022 National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) of the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), the rate of teenage pregnancies among Filipino women aged 15-19 declined from 8.6% in 2017 to 5.4% in 2022, a 38% decrease. This amounts to a projected 406,000 ever-pregnant adolescent girls, 306,000 of whom have already given birth and 79,000 are now pregnant with their first child (UP Population Institute, 2022).

Early pregnancy is a complicated social issue with profound consequences that affect not just the young woman but also her family, community, and society as a whole. Identifying the nature and scope of these consequences serves as essential for establishing efficient measures and creating supportive environments for young mothers and their children. Teenage pregnancy frequently disrupts the young mother's schooling, hampering her future chances and financial security. Furthermore, the

added financial stress on the family might strain relationships and cause tension in the home. Moreover, the expenses of providing social and medical services to these young women and their children may be borne by the community.

Early pregnancy is a societal issue with broad implications that requires a thorough and coordinated approach. This research investigates into the intricate web of consequences associated with teenage pregnancy in social integration in school, peer connections, socialization, discrimination, and coping mechanisms of adolescent mother students at the International School of Asia and the Pacific. Teenage mothers often face social integration challenges, struggling to maintain pre-existing peer relationships or forge new ones due to time constraints and societal judgment. This discrimination and stigma might increase mental health concerns and contribute to feelings of loneliness, necessitating strong coping methods such as seeking assistance from family and friends, engaging in self-care activities, or joining support groups for young mothers.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

For the purpose of the study, a phenomenological research design will be used. The foundation of phenomenological research is the examination and understanding of human lived experiences by means of the identification of the significance and essences of those experiences (Creswell, 2013). Teenage mothers hold an important position in society that is frequently misinterpreted. Their experiences are a multifaceted tapestry made of resiliency, adversity, and hope. The phenomenological approach becomes useful as it provides a strong lens through which to view the lived realities of these young mothers (Pueyo, 2022). With its emphasis on the examination of lived experiences, phenomenology enables researchers to probe into the subjective realm of people—in this case, teenage mothers. A more comprehensive understanding of the social dynamics and difficulties they encounter is made possible by this method (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, phenomenology approach will help researchers in their comprehensive investigation of teenage mothers' lived experiences by elucidating how these women deal with social difficulties in the school inclusion, interpersonal relationship, coping mechanism and stigma.

Respondents of the Study

The researcher will search for 10 teenage mothers' suitable respondents, regardless of marital status, who had their first child as teens ranging in age from 13 to 19 years old and who are current students of the International School of Asia and the Pacific. The researchers will approach the students in International School of Asia and the Pacific and inquire if there is a teenage mother that they know and will be asked if willing to participate in the study. Purposive sampling will also allow for a more in-

depth understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by this particular population, as the selected respondents will have firsthand knowledge and insights to contribute. To protect their privacy, the researcher deliberately kept the names and department details of the individuals confidential.

Data Gathering Tool

Structured interviews were ideal for this research because it will enable the interviewers to dig for clear, in-depth information. It will sooth the interviewers and keep them in charge of the interview, allowing for a free flow of responses or information. Field notes were made to document nonverbal actions that were essential to the study and the answers of the conversational partners of the study. Furthermore, field notes assisted the researchers in remembering topics mentioned in interviews that were not covered in the original notes.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to the commencement of the study, researchers will engage in meticulous preparation, the research process began with obtaining necessary permissions from the faculty of the College of Arts, Sciences and Teacher Education, the Research Office of the institution, and the Administrators to conduct the study.

Upon approval, including the assembly of all necessary materials and the acquisition of informed consent from each conversational partner willing to participate. The research team will uphold the highest ethical standards by ensuring the complete anonymity and confidentiality of all conversational partners throughout the study. This commitment extends to actively safeguarding against any potential distress or discomfort during the research process.

The primary data collection method for this study will be face-to-face interviews. During these interviews, researchers will pose carefully constructed questions designed to elicit the desired information from conversational partners. Upon completion of the interviews, all gathered responses will be meticulously compiled and subjected to rigorous analysis. Thematic analysis will be used in data analysis and this approach will enable the researchers to draw meaningful interpretations and insightful conclusions from the collected data.

Data Analysis

To gain a profound understanding of the phenomenology of teenage mothers, this research employs Colaizzi's method, a qualitative approach for uncovering in-depth meaning from individual narratives. Colaizzi's method provides a structured framework for analyzing qualitative data. The step-by-step process ensures consistency in coding and interpretation, minimizing the influence of researcher bias. Through iterative cycles of data analysis, this method transcends surface-level

descriptions and delves into the subjective world of teenage mothers, illuminating their unique perspectives, challenges, and coping mechanisms. This method excels at illuminating the key themes and patterns present within conversational partners' responses, facilitating the identification of frequently recurring concepts and the uncovering of deeper, latent meanings. While demanding in its meticulousness, Colaizzi's method offers an invaluable lens through which to explore this sensitive topic, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of teenage motherhood. This method excels at illuminating the key themes and patterns present within conversational partners' responses, facilitating the identification of frequently recurring concepts and the uncovering of deeper, latent meanings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

TABLE 1 EMERGENT THEME: CRUCIAL CHANGES

CODES	CLUSTER THEMES	EMERGENT THEME
Unbalanced Responsibilities	Motherhood Responsibilities	CRUCIAL CHANGES
Change	Shifted Priorities	
Sudden Shift		

Table 1 shows the emergent themes are about "Crucial Changes", it indicates that conversational partners are having a hard time to balance their life roles as a student and a mother. This struggle is evident in their daily interactions, as they constantly feel torn between meeting academic responsibilities and fulfilling their duties as a parent. The conversational partners express feelings of guilt and inadequacy, as they struggle to prioritize between their children's needs and their own educational goals. Additionally, the pressure to excel in both roles often leads to feelings of stress and overwhelm, impacting their overall well-being. According to the study of Meena (2014), teenage mothers in academic settings face significant social challenges. Balancing demands of coursework with the essential responsibilities of childcare presents a significant challenge (Nkengbeza et. al, 2018).

TABLE 2. EMERGENT THEME: OSTRACISM

CODES	CLUSTER THEMES	EMERGENT THEME
Negativity	Judgements	OSTRACISM
Stigma		
Prejudice		
Disrespect	Belittlement	
Insults		
Disparaging		
Reluctant	Fear of Rejection	
Apprehension		
Worry		

Table 2 shows the emerging theme “Ostracism”, shows the fear of judgement acts as a significant barrier to social engagement, causing conversational partners to overanalyze interactions and ruminate on others' perceptions. This fear of ostracism can lead individuals to avoid social situations altogether, further perpetuating feelings of loneliness and isolation. According to American Psychological Association (2019) that discrimination is recognized as a public health concern. Studies indicate that the perception of discrimination can trigger a chain of stress-related emotional, physical, and behavioral alterations. Furthermore, Davies & Brooks (2015) discuss the "disparity" between the social lives of teenage mothers before and after pregnancy, often reporting feelings of ostracization within the classroom (Johnson et al., 2022).

TABLE 3 EMERGENT THEME: UNEQUAL PATHS

CODES	CLUSTER THEME	EMERGENT THEME
Exclusion	Social Isolation	UNEQUAL PATHS
Deviation		
Estrangement	Alienation	
Unfit		
Meticulous	Selective Connection	
Skeptical		
Embarrassment	Shame	
Disgrace		

Table 3 shows the emergent theme “Unequal paths”, shows that conversational partners described a significant barrier and a shift to their path they’re taking from their peers. This refers to the feeling of their life trajectory diverging from the paths of their peers who haven't had children. Teenage pregnancy can be a disruptive life event, forcing a reevaluation of identity and future goals (Meena, 2014). This can lead to feelings of their personal path diverging from the one they envisioned before becoming a mother.

TABLE 4 EMERGENT THEME: RELENTLESS TENACITY

CODES	CLUSTER THEME	EMERGENT THEME
Academic Performance	Academic Success	RELENTNESS TENACITY
Diligence in Studying		
Empathy	Understanding	
Perception of the Situation		
Friendship	Quality over Quantity	
Selected Peers		
Determined	Endurance in Hardships	
Stoic		

Table 4 shows the emergent theme “Relentless Tenacity”, shows the conversational partners perseverance and determination despite the challenges that they face.

This theme highlights the resilience and determination of the conversational partners, emphasizing their unwavering commitment to overcoming obstacles and achieving their goals. Despite facing numerous challenges, they exhibit a steadfast resolve to push forward and continue working towards success. The theme of "Relentless Tenacity" underscores the strength and perseverance of these individuals, showcasing their ability to stay focused and motivated in the face of adversity.

TABLE 5 EMERGENT THEME: ADAPTIVE COPING MECHANISM

CODES	CLUSTER THEME	EMERGENT THEME
Faith	Spiritual Connection	ADAPTIVE COPING MECHANISM
Prayer		
Self- Care	Intrapersonal Connection	
Pamper		
Individual Time		
Social Support	Interpersonal Connection	
Emotional Support		

Table 5 shows the emergent theme “Adaptive Coping Mechanism”, describe the different coping mechanism used by the conversational partners. This emergent theme centers on the multifaceted coping mechanisms employed by conversational partners to navigate the inherent challenges discussed. The results of a study conducted by Wainaina et al. (2021) that during pregnancy and early motherhood, conversational partners confronted a range of emotions, including embarrassment, shame, hopelessness, and, in severe instances, even suicidal thoughts. Coping strategies varied among teenage mothers.

TABLE 6 EMERGENT THEME: GROWTH

CODES	CLUSTER THEME	EMERGENT THEME
Resilience	Strength	GROWTH
Adamant		
Maturity	Personal Growth	
Thrive		
Bond	Strengthened Bond with Peers and Friends	
Peer Relationship		
Similarity	Shared Experiences	
The Same Experiences		
Persistent	Resilience	
Perseverance		

Table 6 shows the emergent theme “Growth”, depicts the transformations and growth experienced by the conversational partners following success resolution of the encountered difficulties

and challenges. This aligns with findings from Burton et al. (2019) who explored the experiences of teenage mothers and identified a theme of resilience and personal growth.

TABLE 7 EMERGENT THEME: EVOLVING TOGETHER

CODES	CLUSTER THEME	EMERGENT THEME
Genuine Connection	Quality Connections	EVOLVING TOGETHER
Trust		
Vulnerability		
True	Authenticity	
Individuality	Growth Mindset	
Reframe		
Reshaping their Views	Words of Encouragement	
Motivation		
Support		
Inspiration		

Table 7 shows the emergent theme “Evolving Together”, unveils various pieces of advice from the conversational partners to their fellow teenage mothers. These pieces of advice focus on the importance of seeking support from family and friends, prioritizing self-care, and staying motivated to achieve personal goals despite the challenges of motherhood. Studies by Yi et al. (2019) demonstrate the positive impact of strong social connections on mental well-being and parenting practices, suggesting that these networks can provide a foundation for peer-to-peer support.

DISCUSSIONS

This investigation employed a qualitative methodology to delve into the phenomenology of teenage mother students the International School of Asia and the Pacific. The study focused on three key areas: 1) the experiences teenage mothers in higher education, 2) the specific challenges they encountered in navigating their dual roles, and 3) the coping strategies they developed to manage these challenges.

This study involved ten (10) teenage mothers as conversational partners. One (1) of the conversational partners is 16 years old, two (4) of them are 17 years old, and five (5) of them are 18 years old. All of them continued their studies after stopping for a couple of years.

Based on the study, the conversational partners described a struggle to balance the significant responsibilities of motherhood and academic pursuits. While some, having previously participated in extracurricular activities, valued maintaining an active social life, their priorities shifted towards childcare and studies. This often resulted in less time for socializing, leading to a distancing of some peers who couldn't empathize with their situation. However, the experiences were not homogeneous, with some respondents finding understanding and support from their peers.

Teenage mothers in the study grappled with social isolation. Fear of judgement, fueled by past verbal abuse, led them to overthink interactions and withdraw from social activities. Interestingly, these negative experiences also sparked a determination to build connections despite the challenges. However, becoming mothers intensified their fear of being perceived as distant due to their parental role, and the belief that existing social circles were closed off only deepened their isolation.

Teenage mothers in the study faced social isolation due to judgment and the demands of childcare. This weakened existing friendships and discouraged them from forming new ones. Anxieties about rejection and the stigma of teenage motherhood made them cautious about social connections. They prioritized relationships with accepting individuals, shrinking their social circles. Overall, these challenges created a distinct and social isolation experience for the teenage mothers.

The conversational partners showed impressive resilience in overcoming challenges. They prioritized academics, demonstrating a strong will to succeed. Their maturity helped them navigate relationships with empathy and self-worth. They valued quality friendships over quantity, finding solace in a close support group. Finally, they displayed remarkable resilience by not dwelling on negativity and advocating for themselves.

The conversational partners employed a multifaceted approach to cope with challenges. They found strength in spiritual connection, drawing purpose, strength, and hope from their faith. Intrapersonal connection was fostered through self-care activities and positive self-affirmations to maintain emotional well-being. Finally, strong interpersonal connections with supportive friends and family provided a safe space for expression and guidance, empowering them to navigate their situations with resilience.

The teenage mothers emerged from their challenges transformed. Juggling motherhood and academics honed their strength and resilience, making them valuable assets in school. They experienced significant personal growth, becoming more mature and logical in decision-making. Interestingly, their friendships grew stronger despite shifting priorities, offering a supportive space for shared experiences and advice with other teen mothers. Most importantly, they demonstrated a relentless drive for self-improvement. Instead of succumbing to negativity, they repurposed judgments into fuel for motivation, turning them into sources of strength and determination.

Teenage mothers offered advice to their peers. They emphasized quality friendships over quantity, prioritizing those who share values and offer support. Staying true to oneself, including personal values and perspectives, was seen as key to a positive outlook and navigating social situations. They also encouraged a growth mindset, reframing challenges as learning experiences for

future success. Sharing these lessons would build a supportive community where teenage mothers can learn and grow together.

CENTRAL PHENOMENON: COURAGE: Crucial Changes, Ostracism, Unequal Paths, Relentless Tenacity, Adaptive Coping Mechanism, Growth, Evolving Together



In the middle, we can see a teenage mother here. The teenage mothers at the lower right, you can see here the crucial changes that the teenage mothers have experience. The fingers pointing at them are the ostracism that they faced. The brown path here are the unequal path that they're taking. Which means that they're taking a different path from their peers. The hand above the teenage mothers shows their relentless tenacity. The teenage mother praying, playing, and reading a book shows their different adaptive coping mechanism which is spiritual, intrapersonal and interpersonal connection. The flower at the sides of the mother shows the growth. From a bud to a fully bloomed flower. And the hands above show how the teenage mothers evolved together.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Following a comprehensive data analysis and interpretation of the phenomenology of teenage mother students of International School of Asia and the Pacific, unveils their COURAGE; these teenage mothers faced Crucial Changes balancing motherhood with academics, that despite the Ostracism which are the stigma and discrimination that they faced and Unequal Paths that they are taking

compared to their peers, they displayed Relentless Tenacity, juggling responsibilities fostered the development of Adaptive Coping Mechanisms, leading to their Growth, commencing the urge in helping their fellow teenage mothers so they can start Evolving Together.

Recommendations

While this study offers valuable insights, several limitations are noteworthy. These recommendations can guide future research endeavors aimed at gaining a more comprehensive understanding of teenage mothers in higher education.

1. Future researchers could benefit from a larger and more geographically diverse sample to enhance the generalizability of the findings. This would allow for exploration of potential variations in experiences across different regions and educational institutions.
2. Future researchers could delve deeper into the social network dynamics surrounding teenage mothers. This might involve including family members and close friends as research conversational partners to explore how these relationships impact the mothers' experiences. Furthermore, investigating the role of educational institutions in providing or facilitating support systems for teenage mothers would be valuable.
3. For the institution, create educational program for both teenagers and teenage mothers should also be implemented for them to become aware of the hardships from being a teenage mother and teach the teenage mothers some coping mechanisms.
4. Future researchers could examine existing policies and support systems within educational institutions specifically designed to support teenage mothers.

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