



Batang Ama: The Untold Stories of Single Teenage Fathers

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Received: 02 February 2023

Accepted: 22 April 2023

Published: 05 June 2023

Abstract: *This research tries to establish a significant value in the lived experiences of single teenage fathers. Researchers used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the lens to understand the lived experiences of single teenage fathers. Using data from individual interviews, data analysis produced a synthesis of five individual cases. According to France's (2009) with the use of individual interviews, it is a valuable method of gaining insight into people's perceptions, understandings and experiences of a given phenomenon and can contribute to in-depth data collection. Overall results showed superordinate themes centering on single teenage fathers' (1) Experiences as a teenage father, (2) Peer Adjustment, (3) Acceptance, and (4) Insights gained from experiences. Theoretical and practical reflections of lived experiences stated in the context are discussed. A call for a phenomenologically guided approach is needed for understanding the behavior and mental needs for single teenage fathers.*

Keywords: *Single Teenage Fathers, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Subjective Experience.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Adolescent pregnancy is a global phenomenon with clearly known causes and serious health, social and economic consequences. And according to the data gathered by World Health Organization, every year, an estimated 21 million girls aged 15–19 years become pregnant and approximately 12 million of them give birth [1]. Many teen mothers do not get prenatal care until late in their pregnancy. This is usually because of delayed pregnancy testing, denial, or even fear of telling others about the pregnancy [2].

Societal awareness about the needs of young mothers and their babies prompted an explosion of public policy initiatives, research, and service programs pertaining to adolescent mothers. Meanwhile, adolescent fathers were largely ignored by society and were the targets of



simplistic, harmful stereotypes that depicted them as young males who sexually exploited their female partners, got them pregnant, and then callously abandoned them. These stereotypes contributed to the biased treatment of teenage fathers by practitioners, public policymakers, and researchers. However, thanks to the work of a growing number of open-minded researchers and service providers, a much more complex picture of adolescent fathers has emerged, demonstrating that the lives of teenage fathers are complicated and filled with a multitude of hardships, some of which place them on the path to becoming fathers prematurely, and others of which are consequences of early paternity [3].

Like teenage motherhood, teenage fatherhood has many negative educational, financial, social, health, and other developmental consequences for these young men and their children [4]. And like the case of teenage mothers which became a popular topic for research, studying the experiences of single teenage fathers will help us identify interesting perceptions of these people in childbearing. This regard to the above-mentioned concern pointed out the ignored literature that focuses specifically on the experiences of young fathers [5]. Therefore, in response to the existing gap, researchers have paid attention to the voices of young single fathers. This paper also journeys with other scholars in building fatherhood literature, but this research navigates more on the paths of young unmarried fathers. The focus is on hearing the voices of young fathers with regard to pregnancy and aims to explore young unmarried fathers' experiences and perceptions of childbearing.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research utilized a qualitative design, with the use of in-depth interview (IDI) as the strategy for data collection and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the framework for data analysis. An in-depth interview (IDI) is a type of qualitative research, it involves an interview, often with just a single respondent, and is conducted by a trained interviewer [6]. The researcher decided to use a semi-structured interview with single teenage fathers to be able to gather rich data from the respondents. This was only done when a researcher felt that a particular respondent's response did not provide sufficient details about the topic. The decision to use IPA as a framework is in line with the research objectives of allowing single teenage fathers to share their stories from their own points of view. Such research could concentrate on exploring and assessing the lived experiences of teenage single fathers.

This study's participants were selected using purposive sampling, consisting of five (5) currently working or studying single teenage fathers from different regions in the Philippines. Purposive sampling refers to the process by which researchers carefully consider how they will select a sample population, even if that population is not statistically representative of the larger population under consideration [7]. In the logic of small samples in interview-based the authors noted that using fewer than 20 participants, ideally at least 5, during a qualitative research study will result in better data [8]. The reason was that with a smaller group, it is easier for the researcher to build strong close relationships with the participants, which in turn leads to more natural conversations and better data. Similarly, having a smaller group of participants was



also the practice of other qualitative studies [9-11].

The interview took place online via Google Meet, Zoom, or a face-to-face private interview. All participants agreed to have their interviews conducted on the dates and times of their choice, which gave them the freedom to speak more freely and truthfully about the research topic in either Filipino or English language. The responses were transcribed and translated for analysis and discussion. Appropriate qualitative descriptions were used in order to have a comprehensive analysis of data. And lastly, the properly analyzed results were used in making the discussion of the research findings.

The researchers followed four criteria of trustworthiness to employ in qualitative research to establish credibility within the study. Credibility, reliability, confirmability, and transferability are these four criteria. According to what was noted by the researchers, they conducted this investigation according to ethical standards. The principles of ethical research that a researcher should adhere to are as follows: respect for others, goodness, justice, consent, and confidentiality [12].

3. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

All participants in this study were single teenage fathers or had been single teenage fathers. To answer the three (3) research questions, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed. There were four (4) themes and twelve (12) subthemes that the analysis of data established.

Table 1. List of the specific sub-themes and supporting quotes for each of the master themes.

Essential Themes	Core Ideas
Experiences as a teenage father	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feelings of responsibility Feelings of separation to the peers or age groups experiences <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sense of Regret
Peer Adjustment	Avoiding other people to steer clear of bad comments <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Getting along with others
Acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acknowledgement of the situation• Acknowledgement of parental responsibility• Forced emotional maturity• Hardwork
Insights gained from experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Feelings of guilt for losing teenage life Importance of safe sex practices <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parental difficulties



3.1 Experiences as a teenage father

Feelings of responsibility. Participants were all feel obligated by their responsibilities when they become young fathers. Some realized that they need to prioritize the need of their children than their own personal needs. They have no other choice than taking care of their child and stop doing what they used to enjoy before. All parents navigate challenges as their children grow and develop. Many of these challenges are the same for teenage parents and older parents. But teenage parents might have to navigate some special challenges, like self-regulation, taking the lead or being overwhelmed by the responsibility of raising a child at a young age [13].

Feelings of separation to the peers or age groups experiences. Some of the participants felt restricted by their obligations and that they could no longer accomplish the same goals as their peers because they had to put their children's needs first. Some of them perceive their situation as a hindrance to their goals in life specifically in terms of their academic and career goals. Others also think that they have to be wise enough in managing their time between school and paternal responsibilities. Teen parents often experience a vast change in their social lives. Some drop out of school to devote time to raising children [14]. Others may stay in school but must drop extracurricular activities or find a job to support their child's needs. The participants' answers shows that there are visible changes comparing to their peers or people who are in their age group.

Sense of Regret. Teenage life was viewed as enjoyable and free of major obligations. Participants regret their passive decisions that changes their entire lives. They regret losing their freedom due to their caught-up situation. Being not able to do the things that they wish to when they were free from parental responsibilities such as the opportunities of finishing school. Many of the single teenage fathers experienced regret of parent at the very early age as they are not prepared for everything especially on the unplanned situations. Young parents really experienced being regretful because this is the consequence of the things that they have done in their past. Most of them regret it for they cannot bring back the time and correct all the things that they made wrong [15].

3.2 Peer Adjustment

Avoiding other people to steer clear of bad comments. Teenagers typically maintain a low profile when challenged with embarrassment in order to maintain as much privacy as possible. They would typically stay away from others to avoid becoming the focus of attention while they waited for a time when the news was no longer breaking and nobody was talking about it [16].

Getting Along with others. It is challenging to play the role of a father at such a young age. It requires a lot of effort to meet the basic demands while managing your child's needs and current circumstances. Getting along with other people is one of their challenges but also became their strength in the long run [17]. It shows in their statement that they should be interacting with peers that understands their situation and could give pieces of advice as the experiences are still novel to them.



3.3 Acceptance

Acknowledgement of parental responsibility. To put it briefly, they went from being dependent on their parents for support to now providing for their own child. Additionally, the majority of young fathers lack financial independence, which makes it seem challenging to support their children financially, indicating that he is unprepared for the duties and function of parenthood in general. Emotional availability is regularly cited as an important feature of modern fatherhood, often described as ‘being there’. ‘Being there’ can be described as a father who cares for his children and is emotionally close to them, an aspect of their parenting that sits alongside their traditional provider role. The narrative of ‘doing my best’ has been highlighted as an alternative indicator of good fatherhood from young men's accounts [18].

Forced emotional maturity. Due to the demands of the circumstances, one participant bravely stated that he need to be strong for his child for this is the consequences of his actions. Because there is already a child that is involved in the situation, hence doing things for one’s personal gain is already an exception. He must forget the old lifestyle and move forward with life for the sake of his child. As the teenage fathers went through the changes in their lives, most of the participants shows that they must accept their fates as a single teenage father. By drawing on existing cultural notions of “being a man,” they are able to shore up a respectable masculinity—as one who is in charge and responsible—while also signifying good-dad identities. Indeed, employing a language of traditional masculinity provides an acceptable and coherent way of responding to the criticism they face. Still, knowing what is expected of them doesn’t eliminate the challenges they must confront to actually “be there” and “step up.” Also, this is an indication of forced maturity [19].

Hardwork. Accepting the rapid transition from your former way of life to the obligations single father must face involves hardwork. One of the participants emphasized how he provides for the basic needs of his child stating that he did his best for his work. Others shared their strategy to earn for a living just to provide and to survive for their daily needs. This just confirms that these single teenage fathers are putting in all the effort on behalf of their child by spending their time working rather than attending school. Teenage fathers need to work to be able to provide with the child. 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 [20].

3.4 Insights gained from experiences

Feelings of guilt for losing teenage life. The participants' experiences were first probed, and then their insights on their experiences were requested. Their experiences had been too much that they felt guilt for losing their teenage life. Perhaps as a result of the rapid transition in their priorities from his old lifestyle to the present, where their child is their only priority and not anymore, the activities that he used to do with his friends [21]. This is also evident in Participant 2’s statement: In addition, one of the participants has shared that even if he is already a father, he has a lot of things that he wanted to do because he is still a teen but because of these circumstances, he sets aside or sacrificed them for the sake of his child [22].



Importance of safe sex practices. They realize to not take a rush on everything and enjoy every moment of teenage life. It is like if they could turn back the time where they are free to do things, they will bear this in mind to have safe sex practices so that they will not experience being a father at such a young age. Hence, they also realized that one should be mindful of the consequences of their actions otherwise, toughest responsibilities may be the result. Prevention of teen pregnancy interventions should design appropriate programs for teen fathers to prepare them to transition from teenagers to fatherhood. Some of the participants advocated to value the importance of having a safe sex [23]. This also shows the need of teenagers to have a proper sex education and repercussion of being an early father. Research shows that sex education that's culturally responsive and inclusive helps young people develop the social and emotional skills they need to become caring and empathetic adults. Sex education which is not only for women but also for men, focusing on the roles and responsibility of men when it comes to sex [24].

Parental difficulties. Having a child as a lone parent who does all the provisions of its basic needs is a one true difficult task especially as a teen father [25]. Just like Participant 5 as an example, wherein his way to earn for a living is through extra jobs in his neighborhood that he leaves his child to his neighbor. Despite this bitterness of circumstances, he realized that although he enjoys taking care and providing the needs of his child, it is still difficult to be a single parent. Society implicates that women are the only ones who suffers from the broken relationships that leads to separation, that the child was left to the mother while the father committed adultery or had a third party. The research shows that it can also happen vice versa. Most of the participant shows that they have experienced that their partner left them. The proportion of teenage parents who were separated or divorced was higher than that of their classmates at all time periods (1, 5, and 11 years after expected high school graduation) [26]. Even after controlling for age of first marriage, the association between age at first birth and subsequent separation or divorce was significant. Thus, the support or further guidance to men who became teenage fathers are as important as teenage mothers [26].

4. CONCLUSION

Most of our respondents enjoyed spending more time on hangouts and leisure activities prior to becoming teenage fathers thus, majority of their time is spent with their friends. However, when they became a father at an early age, there were a lot of adjustments due to the responsibilities a father should have, as he is the lone parent that supports the child. Even if they are still in their parents' care, they face many difficulties and obstacles, particularly in balancing their attention and time for the child and finding ways to make money in order to provide for their basic needs.

Furthermore, despite the bitterness of the situation, they had a positive outlook about their future and there were lessons learned during the process. In addition, positive changes also occurred, such as the rapid transformation from a teenager to a teen father who was inspired to be responsible and mature and to look out for his child. Moreover, they have realizations about life such as before embarking into fatherhood, there is a need for careful decision-making.



Lastly, this study will be beneficial to male teenagers as they will have knowledge and they may understand that there is a great responsibility in becoming a father at a young age and the lived experiences of a single teenage father and also, to parents and guardians as an awareness of the youthful activities of their child as a male teenager.

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