



Unveiling Socioeconomic Disparities: Understanding Pregnancy Awareness and Family Well-being among Middle-Late Adolescent Mothers across Diverse Socioeconomic Strata in Urban Manila, Philippines

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ABSTRACT: This research study examines the real-life experiences of adolescent mothers within the age group of 13-17 years old (middle adolescence) to 18-21 years old (late adolescence), coming from middle and low socioeconomic backgrounds. Using different qualitative research techniques, this study aims to uncover unique obstacles, coping strategies, and support networks encountered by teenage mothers from different economic strata. A total of 6 teenage mothers from middle-class (n=3) and low-income (n=3) settings is conducted to gather their stories and perspectives. Thematic analysis is employed to discern common threads and distinctions between the two groups, creating themes to categorize the similarities between their responses. The outcomes of this inquiry offer valuable insights into how socioeconomic status intersects with teenage parenthood, underscoring four significant factors that emerged through the data analysis: Support Systems, Educational and Career Trajectory, Family Dynamics and Expectations, and Awareness and Perception. Having identified these themes can design a path towards creating customized interventions and support mechanisms for both vulnerable demographics while advocating for more inclusive and educational programs in raising awareness and removing the stereotypes about teenage pregnancy. For future researchers interested in studying the real-life experiences of adolescent mothers from different economic backgrounds, it is essential to consider the myriad of factors that shape their lives. These factors include race, culture, and geographical location, all of which intersect with their socioeconomic status to influence their experiences.

KEYWORDS: comparative investigation, different social classes, teenage pregnancy, firsthand experiences, qualitative research study, unplanned parenthood.

INTRODUCTION

Teenage Pregnancies and teenage motherhood are a cause for concern worldwide, which contributes to significant problems in society, such as poverty, vices, unemployment, lack of education, and the rising number of street children. As of 2020, statistics show that among ASEAN nations, the Philippines has one of the highest rates of adolescent births (UNFPA, 2020). Most are too young to know their goals and plans, emphasizing the significant need for education, guidance, and support. However, the majority experience the fear of “side effects” rather than wholly the responsibilities of being a mother who is also a child herself.

In a study by Salvador et al. (2016), various factors contributing to teenage pregnancy were identified; such factors include socio-economic status, limited knowledge of sexual education, early engagement in sexual activity, family history of adolescent pregnancy, and the influence of technology and social media. Such factors were identified among diverse participants presenting insights on the limited sexual education in connection to cultural aspects, the impact of technological access to teenage pregnancy, and the role of responsible parenthood in preventing teenage pregnancies. The issue of adolescent pregnancy concerning socio-economic status presents to be significant, as supported by various studies. According to Ekanayake et al. (2016), studies conducted have consistently shown that there exists an association between low socio-economic status and increased chances of being pregnant at a young age. In connection to this, teens from low socio-economic backgrounds are more prone to teenage pregnancies because of factors like a lack of consciousness about the impacts of early sexual debut and early marriages (Chirwa et al., 2019). However,



recent studies also prove that because of the increasing sexual freedom, teenage pregnancy also occurs in higher socioeconomic groups.

Another key finding also emphasized the importance of exploring the challenges of young adolescent mothers and the struggle of transitioning into early motherhood, from increasing the burden of responsibility to experiencing physical problems and inefficiency in the maternal role (Mangeli et al., 2017). So, it is essential to understand what happens during pregnancy and childbirth to successfully support a teenager through transitioning into motherhood.

The study focuses only on the level of pregnancy awareness between the two social classes. However, getting respondents appropriate for the study and the participants' reluctance to disclose personal experiences and perspectives fully can pose a significant limitation in the deep comprehension of the study. This can impact the validity and reality of the collected data, potentially leading to an incomplete understanding of the factors influencing pregnancy awareness within the chosen social classes.

In the broader context, tackling the issues and factors surrounding teenage pregnancies can be of enormous help in breaking the cycle and domino effect that comes along with early motherhood. The struggles perpetuated by teenage pregnancies extend not only to the mothers themselves but also their families, communities, and even society as a whole (Mangeli et al., 2017). The significance of the research is that it focused on what interventions can be done in the aftermath of pregnancy. Furthermore, this study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify the demographic profile of the participants in terms of:
 - a. Current Age
 - b. Location/City
 - c. Socioeconomic status
 - d. Respondent's Current Age
 - e. Respondent's Age in their First-Born Baby
 - f. Adolescence Group
 - g. No. of Years Being a Mother
2. To assess the differences in pregnancy awareness and knowledge of adolescent mothers between the middle and low classes who became pregnant.
3. To analyze how socioeconomic status impacts the family's quality of life, dynamics, and overall well-being following their abrupt transition from adolescence to motherhood.

METHODOLOGY

In this comprehensive understanding of teenage pregnancy, qualitative interviews will be the main research method in this study, offering nuanced explorations of their experiences and perspectives as teenage mothers across middle-class and low-class backgrounds. The deliberate choice of direct involvement with the participants emphasizes the dedication to authentically explore non-medical aspects of post-partum life satisfaction and educational success. Researchers employ the art of writing open-ended questions to create an environment where participants are not only respondents but storytellers who share their unique stories. By Amberscript Company's directives (2023), this methodological approach emphasizes the need to add to the richness of qualitative data by encouraging the participants to express the minute and personal details of their experiences as teenage mothers. This research aims to provide an in-depth and complex assessment of the struggles and victories of teenage mothers in different social classes.

In addition, the interview is selected as a research method because of its strength in revealing the subjective experiences of teenage mothers (Watts et al., 2015). This qualitative approach instead permits a thorough examination of the complex relationship between life satisfaction and educational choices for these young mothers. Using qualitative methodology, the research deals with the complexity of their lives and improves the study's ability to represent a real and comprehensive representation of adolescent mothers' lives. Participants' involvement during interviews allows them to understand their feelings and ways of thinking more deeply. As a result, firsthand engagements are instrumental to a more well-rounded perception of the complex realities of teenage mothers following pregnancy.

The chosen participants will be from middle-class and lower-class demographics by purposive sampling and, therefore, will have a diverse point of view. This is due to the purposive sample method in which samples are purposively taken from the total sample size by the discretion or judgment of the investigator or survey taker (Vijayamohan, 2023). Furthermore, the research relied



on a six (6) participant sample to enable a detailed exploration of the least common theme. This was done to avoid a generalized treatment of the rare phenomenon under investigation (Fugard & Potts, 2015). This smaller sample size is deemed sufficient for capturing nuanced insights within the scope of the study, where three (3) respondents came from a low-class background.

In contrast, the other three (3) came from a middle-class background, optimizing resource efficiency while providing meaningful findings related to the specific theme of interest. Also, informed consent will be obtained, and structured interviews will be conducted, ensuring all key topics are covered (Adams, 2015). Utilizing structured interviews, the process will involve a combination of closed and open-ended questions. Participants will be asked to respond to these questions through an online form, allowing for flexibility and convenience. All responses will be anonymized to ensure confidentiality, safeguarding participants' privacy. Considering this, the researchers will assign unique codes LC-1, LC-2, and LC-3 for the participants from the lower class, whereas MC-1, MC-2, and MC-3 for the middle class. However, the codes assigned to them are random and do not signify any specific characteristics or attributes of the participants.

Thematic analysis will identify patterns, themes, and variations in the qualitative data collected through interviews. This approach qualitatively analyzes data by examining patterns within a dataset to identify and extract themes. The researcher's subjective engagement is pivotal in uncovering significance and meaning within the data to unveil key insights (Dovetail Editorial Team, 2023). Codes will be generated from the interview transcripts, and themes will be derived through a constant comparative method. Therefore, this rigorous analysis aims to comprehensively understand how middle-class and low-class teenage mothers perceive their life satisfaction and educational pursuits post-pregnancy.

RESULTS

This section of the study gives a detailed introduction to the demographic characteristics of the study participants on teenage motherhood in the Urban Manila area, putting them into groups by their social classes: lower and middle. The data will be composed of their current age, the age at which they began having children, their years as mothers, and the support systems they have received. The study delves into four emergent themes: The following spending areas, Education and Career Trajectory, Family Dynamics, and Expectation, alongside Awareness and Perception, offer perspectives into the different experiences and ideas of social-economic strata teenage mothers.

Table 1. Demographic Profile

Respondent	Code	Location/City	Socioeconomic Status	Respondent's Current Age	Respondent's Age in their First-Born Baby	Adolescence Group	No. of Years being a Mother
1	LC-1	Masinag, Antipolo, Rizal	Lower class	28	19	Late	9
2	MC-1	Parañaque, Metro Manila	Middle class	25	17	Mid	8
3	MC-2	Alabang, Muntinlupa, Metro Manila	Middle class	26	17	Mid	9
4	LC-2	Malate, Manila, Metro Manila	Lower class	25	17	Mid	8
5	MC-3	Sampaloc, Manila, Metro Manila	Middle class	27	18	Late	8
6	LC-3	Marikina, Metro Manila	Lower class	21	17	Mid	4



Table 1 lists the demographic data of the participants who participated in the study. Each participant was given a unique code to maintain privacy and confidentiality. Information was collected about their location/city, socioeconomic status, current age when they became mothers, and the years they have been mothers. Moreover, the sample consisted of respondents from two socioeconomic backgrounds — lower and middle — living around Metro Manila. The current age of the participants and the age when they had their first child ranged from 21-28 and 17 to 19 years old, respectively.

Furthermore, the years they became mothers varied between 4 and 9 years. Among the six participants, three belong to the “mid” adolescent group, while the remaining three fall into the “late” adolescent group. It is crucial to study these demographic characteristics to understand the different backgrounds of the participants, which is essential in understanding the context of their experiences and attitudes toward motherhood.

Four themes emerged through the data analysis: 1) Support Systems, 2) Educational and Career Trajectory, 3) Family Dynamics and Expectations, and 4) Awareness and Perception.

Support Systems

The six respondents recognize that robust support systems are most important in assisting adolescent mothers in their journey. Family and partner support proved crucial for low-income and middle-class families (Norton et al., 2023; Mastrotheodoros et al., 2018). For the participants of the low class, the financial assistance from their parents alleviated the economic pressure, which is mainly associated with teenage pregnancy. However, middle-class adolescent mothers got financial assistance that enabled them to pursue their academic pursuits.

MC-3 reported ...

“I have been supported by my family, the father of my child and his family. We are co-parenting despite our pursuit of education. Since we both do not have any work, we depend on our family's financial support.”

Meanwhile, emotional support is essential to building resilience and overall health, especially in the middle classes, because it helps them cope with parenting difficulties. Despite the difference in resources, the general similarities of the support they receive from their family and partners in addressing the matters corresponding to teenage parenthood were apparent.

Educational and Career Trajectory

The impact of teenage parenthood on educational attainment turned out to be an identical concern of all the participants, which shed light on the intricate difficulties of taking care of the child's needs while coping with the tasks of adolescence. Handling the two roles of a student and a mother is challenging. This involves the complex decision-making undertaken by teen parents forced to choose between school work and parenthood. Despite their difficulties, all participants showed a strong will to keep trying to continue their education. However, students from lower social classes had to put their learning on hold for some time, mainly because their childcare posed significant obstacles.

LC-3 said...

“It changed my priorities in a way that I put my studies and dreams on hold to focus on my daughter. I believe education is still essential, but I will continue it at a later time.”

On the one hand, all the participants from the middle class were more fortunate to continue their studies, having more access to support networks and resources to support them than the others.

Family Dynamics and Expectations

Six respondents' motherhood experiences indicate families' mixed roles after their early pregnancies. Some families who initially expressed their disappointment or concern later remained encouraging and supportive. This support came in various styles, including emotional and financial assistance. Similarly, certain families provided advice and financial assistance to aid teenage mothers in attaining their education and career targets. On one hand, there were situations where emotional support was lacking, although financial aid was provided. Besides any initial frustrations, the families learn to adapt their expectations to help the teenage moms realize and pursue their dreams. For the lower social classes, a visible shift in family expectations occurred, which frequently required a balancing act between raising a family and pursuing one's dreams.

LC-2 stated...

“Their expectations may have swerved, likely with the possibility of me being delayed in terms of educational achievements.”



LC-3 highlighted that her plans changed by saying...

"It changed my priorities in a way that I put my studies and dreams on hold to focus on my daughter."

In contrast, respondents from middle-class backgrounds reported more supportive family dynamics and expectations. MC-2 noted...

"As for my family, they were supportive of me having to keep and support the child."

Likewise, MC-3 highlighted her family and her child's father's backing, stating...

"Lucky, I have been supported by my family, the father of my child and his family."

Awareness and Perception

The idea of teenage pregnancy was seen differently by low and middle-class family members. On the other hand, middle-class teenage mothers were aware of campaigns before conceiving, whereas lower-class mothers seldom knew about teenage pregnancies. LC-1 replied "No" when she was asked if she knew about any teenage pregnancy campaigns before she got pregnant. The representatives from both parties highlighted the need for sex education programs to be improved, but they presented slightly different opinions on this question.

LC-2 underlines the importance of making sexual education enjoyable and widespread by saying...

"There are programs regarding this, but it should be fun to listen to and implemented more properly so that teenage pregnancies could be prevented more."

Also, MC-3 commented on the areas to improve...

"As a teen who faced an unexpected pregnancy, I think sex education still needs improvement. Some schools are not really open about it."

Concerning the social attitudes held for teenage mothers, the surveyed respondents from both social classes agreed that this prejudice and discrimination should be lifted.

Nonetheless, MC-2 shared her views, stating...

"Any kind of government support would be beneficial,"

whereas LC-2 said...

"Reducing the judgment of others, especially the ones who haven't been through this and more listening to rather than judging the child."

DISCUSSION

The results from this study reveal the important function of support systems in the lives of adolescent mothers. Both low-economic and middle-class family members contribute immensely to providing financial and emotional support to teenage mothers. This shows the importance of familial networks and partner support to parents during teen parenting challenges. These results resonate with the findings from Norton et al. (2023) and Mastrotheodoros et al. (2018), which mostly call for supervision from parents and partners in teenage pregnancy to mitigate both the economic and emotional burdens.

Financial assistance helps low-income teenage mothers alleviate their economic burdens and allows them to prioritize motherhood primarily. Meanwhile, the case differs for middle-class adolescent mothers, who receive support that helps them continue their education and pursue their career goals, showing their access to the multifaceted support systems that cater to their various needs. Nevertheless, it has been demonstrated through the participants' narratives that collaborative efforts from their families and partners are necessary to meet the necessary resources for adolescent mothers to do well.

The need to reconcile the expectations of becoming a mother with the challenges of academic pursuit is one of the biggest challenges that teenage mothers face, forcing them to make hard decisions about their priorities (Herbon et al., 2022). Participant reports outline the difficulties facing adolescent mothers, especially the low economic class ones, with childcare concerns that lead, most times, to the postponement of their education aspirations in most cases. On the contrary, teenage mothers from middle-class backgrounds demonstrate a higher propensity to enroll and remain at school and take advantage of their academically oriented support networks and resources, besides appropriate child care.

The results show a wide range of parental reactions to teen pregnancy, from first disappointment to final adaptation and support. Though a few families supplied emotional and financial support, others just tended to provide financial aid, requiring teens to pursue their studies and desires. One of the most striking family-related changes among the lower social class is that they now



face the burden of dealing with personal ambitions and family obligations. On the other side of the spectrum, people coming from middle-class backgrounds relayed their families' steady support and hence experienced a continuation into motherhood as they furthered their education and professional goals. These findings were echoed in a study by Sedgh et al. (2015), in which middle-class families typically provide more consistent support, enabling teenage mothers to pursue their educational and professional ambitions while managing motherhood.

Besides, the gap in the level of knowledge of the campaigns for teenage pregnancy was noticed among both the low— and middle-class respondents, thus indicating the need for specific educational programs. Middle-class teenage mothers recognized prenatal campaigns, but low-class teenage mothers did not have the chance to familiarize themselves with them. Participants from low-income households underscored the importance of not just informative but also practical sex education. In contrast, middle-income participants emphasized that school-based courses do not provide all the necessary information.

Moreover, despite differing socio-economic statuses, respondents from both groups had one thing in common: fighting discrimination against teenage mothers was their shared aspiration. The low-income respondents underscored empathy and understanding, concluding with the call for a shift from judgment to active listening and support. On the contrary, the middle-class respondents highlighted the importance of governmental support. Furthermore, the study's findings resonate with the findings of Shrestha (2021), which reveals disparities in awareness and access to prenatal campaigns between low and middle-class teenage mothers, with low-income households emphasizing practical sex education and empathy to combat discrimination, while middle-income participants advocate for government support. However, both groups share a unified goal of combating discrimination against teenage mothers.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that the socio-economic background of teenage mothers plays a vital role in influencing their experiences. Factors such as emotional and financial support systems, different family dynamics, level of awareness regarding teenage pregnancy, and educational challenges are the most evident ones based on the gathered data. Emotional support from families and their partners helps build or restore the well-being of adolescent mothers, specifically those in the middle class, who can easily access this type of support. Then, financial support comes into the picture. The study shows that the socio-economic background of teenage mothers plays a vital role in influencing their experiences. Factors such as emotional and financial support systems, different family dynamics, level of awareness regarding teenage pregnancy, and educational challenges are the most evident ones based on the gathered data. Emotional support from families and their partners helps build or restore the well-being of adolescent mothers, specifically those in the middle class who can easily access this type of support. Then, financial support comes into the picture as the most important.

Simply put, financial support is essential for helping young mothers manage economic challenges, allowing them to focus on childcare or pursue their education and career ambitions. The research also reveals significant educational barriers for adolescent mothers, especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who often struggle to access childcare, leading to delays in their education. Despite these challenges, their determination to continue learning is clear. However, there are differences between low-income and middle-class adolescent mothers, with the latter having better access to resources and support.

Lastly, the study emphasizes the importance of raising awareness and changing perceptions about teenage pregnancy. There are disparities in exposure to campaigns and sex education programs based on socio-economic status. Targeted educational efforts and initiatives to combat discrimination are crucial to support adolescent mothers and improve their overall well-being effectively. Simply put, financial support is essential for helping young mothers manage economic challenges, allowing them to focus on childcare or pursue their education and career ambitions. The research also reveals significant educational barriers for adolescent mothers, especially those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who often struggle to access childcare, leading to delays in their education. Despite these challenges, their determination to continue learning is clear. However, there are differences between low-income and middle-class adolescent mothers, with the latter having better access to resources and support.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For future researchers interested in studying the real-life experiences of teenage mothers from different economic backgrounds, it is essential to consider the myriad of factors that shape their lives. These factors include race, culture, and



geographical location, all of which intersect with their socioeconomic status to influence their experiences. Researchers can gain insight into how their challenges and successes evolve by conducting longitudinal studies that follow teenage mothers from pregnancy through early parenthood. Collaborating with community organizations, advocacy groups, and healthcare providers ensures that the research is culturally sensitive and beneficial to the studied communities. Additionally, using various research methods, such as interviews, surveys, and observations, allows a complete understanding of teenage mothers' experiences. Furthermore, adopting a strengths-based perspective, which focuses on the resilience and capabilities of teenage mothers, can provide a more nuanced understanding of their experiences and inform strategies for promoting positive outcomes.

To assist this understanding by adopting the research questionnaire, researchers can access the research questionnaire used in this study through the link (<https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX-1vT9AllWDrbTCUhYctuVuJcs0wgZylWQ9b4MVUORDHNFV9VWfR6TMFrMxPitb2BIYg/pub>).

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