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THE UNTOLD STORIES OF CHILDHOOD TO PARENTHOOD

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ABSTRACT

Background: Adolescence is a transitory period in an individual's life. It is a fascinating stage as the individual goes through a period of adjustments. **Objective(s):** This study inquired into the phenomenon of teenage pregnancy and aims to narrate the experiences of teenage parents as they take in their role. **Methods:** It utilized the narrative inquiry to teenage mothers from Cebu City with age range of 13 to 17 years of age, and whose partner may be living together or not. Individual interview was done however, there was no specific guide questions used. As the narration took place, the researchers took notes on the plot, scene, setting and characterization of events. **Results:** This narrates the story of young women who experienced an unexpected life transition, from being a teenager to becoming a mother with the following highlights of their stories: A Family in Turmoil, The Girl in Trouble meets the Knight in Shining Armor, The Perfect Girl is Gone, Letting the Storm Rage On, The Storm did Bother her, To Rise like the Break of Dawn. The journey revealed a transition from a young girl full of vigor and enthusiasm to a young mother who is faced with the responsibility of childrearing at a time where she is supposed to grow and flourish. **Conclusions:** Narration of the lives of teenage mothers provided appreciation of the struggles they've been through. This sheds the light on the realities they face because of the harsh transition from being a girl to eventually becoming a young mother.

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INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a transitory period in an individual's life. It is a fascinating stage as the individual goes through a period of adjustments: understanding one's growth changes (physical, psychological, emotional, social), building self-esteem and confidence and maintaining healthy relationships with parents and peers (Cabigon, 1999) and the formation of one's values, attitudes and behavior to adapt and adjust childhood behaviors to culturally acceptable adult (Aghnia, 2018). Hall in 1904 posited adolescence is viewed as the "period of storm and stress." It is the stage where individuals try to employ series of physical, emotional, psychological and social adjustments as a response to ever changing existential condition to achieve homeostasis (Datu and Mateo, 2012).

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With its marked physiological changes and sexual awareness, adolescence is a period of experimentation that creates a crisis between the self concept created in earlier stages and role diffusion, which involves relationships with peers and institutions. The task that an adolescent faces in resolving the crisis requires integrating self-knowledge amid judgments emanating from contemporaries and peers. At various times during this crisis resolution, the adolescent has to decide whether to rebel or submit to prevailing cultural institutions (Chudacoff, 2008). During adolescence, teenagers often feel pressure to make friends and fit in with their peers. Many times these teens let their friends influence their decision to have sex even when they do not fully understand the consequences associated with the act. They have sex as a way to appear cool and sophisticated, but in some cases the end result is an unplanned teen pregnancy (Bodeeb, 2017). Teenage pregnancy is the condition of being pregnant of adolescence aged 12 to 19. The rising trend is alarming for the Philippines. According to the National Demographic and Health Survey 2013, one in

ten young Filipino women age 12 - 19 has begun childbearing (Rajapaksa-Hewageegana, 2012). For the government to address this pressing problem they passed the bill Republic Act 10354 Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012. This law guarantees universal access to methods on contraception, fertility control, sexual education, and maternal care. Responsible Parenthood as defined by the bill is the will and ability of a parent to respond to the needs and aspirations of the family and children. It is likewise a shared responsibility between parents to determine and achieve the desired number of children, spacing and timing of their children according to their own family life aspirations, taking into account psychological preparedness, health status, sociocultural and economic concerns consistent with their religious convictions. This bill lacks the program that would address for the preparation of a teenager to responsible parenthood but rather on the prevention of teenage pregnancy. With the growing trend of teenage pregnancy it is the intention of this study to explore the experiences of teenage parent as they take on their new role.

Review of Literature and Studies: Adolescent parents and their children are both at critical points in their lives, when their life courses can be shaped toward healthy development, stability, and productivity, or toward life-long poverty and dependency. Efforts to improve outcomes for these young families must take advantage of every opportunity to connect them with the services and support that will help them move toward positive growth (Stephens, Wolf, & Batten, 2003). Teenage parents may be particularly vulnerable for a range of reasons teenage parenthood can be a positive, maturing experience for young women and young men, generating a greater sense of responsibility, providing stability and giving them the motivation to change their lives. However, early parenthood can also have far-reaching physical, social and emotional consequences for both teenage parents and their children. Teenage mothers are more likely than older mothers to live in socioeconomic deprivation, depend on a benefit, and have a low level of education and literacy. They are also less likely to be surrounded by supportive social networks. Very early parenting (before age 18) is associated with the greatest risk of poor outcomes for children. Furthermore, young mothers who have a second pregnancy during their teenage years have an increased chance of experiencing further social inequality (Families Commission, 2011). Teenage fathers need to be engaged as parents. Many young men have serious intentions about being a father, including their intention to provide effective care and financial and material support, but they often face challenges in their relationship with the child's mother and in maintaining contact with their children. Regardless of whether the parents are together, the relationship between the father and the mother needs to be managed well to facilitate a healthier relationship between the father and child. Teenage fathers need accessible information and support that engages them in their parenting role. This can be provided through avenues such as early childhood education and support groups. Service providers need to continue removing barriers to services that prevent teenage fathers from accessing them (Families Commission, 2011).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study utilized the narrative inquiry design. Narrative inquiry is a means by which the researcher systematically gather, analyze, and represent people's stories as told by them,

which challenges traditional and modernist views of truth, reality, knowledge and personhood. The informants were teenage mothers with age range of 13 to 17 years of age, and whose partner may be living together or not. The study was conducted in Cebu City, and neighboring towns in which coordination with the health centers was done to identify the respective participants. There was no specific guide questions needed but as the narration takes place, the researchers take notes on the plot, scene, setting and characterization of events. Ethics clearance was secured from the Ethics Review Board of the University. The researchers ensured that the informants are able to comprehensively understand the study with all due consideration of their level of understanding. Before signing the consent, every informant was provided with an explanation about the process of narrative inquiry with assurance of anonymity. Consent for audio recording was asked from the informants. The informants validated the data collected. Audio recorded information and transcriptions were destroyed after the completion of the study. The three C's of analysis, from coding to categorizing to concepts was employed: Coding the data, observational notes and text into meaningful chunks; Categorize data by removing the redundant data and identify critical elements and lastly identifying the key concepts that would lead to the relevance of this study.

RESULTS

From a Young Girl to a Young Mother: This narrates the story of a young woman who experienced an unexpected life transition, from being a teenager to becoming a mother. They entered into a phase of their lives full of expectations that happiness is about to come. Least they expect is that looking for that happiness is filled pains and tribulations.

A Family in Turmoil: These girls were born to a family bursting with difficulties. **Arielle** was a daughter of a woman who frequently usesshabu. Her mother became insane and was separated with her father. They are all girls with different fathers. They are six sisters. The three of them is with their grandfather in her father's side and the other three is with her grandmother in her mother's side. She was discouraged of the situation. Her mother has not attended to them since they were children. Her grandfather was the only one who took care of them. She even said to her, "*Why did you give birth to us if you won't even care.*" When she talks sometimes she is sane but later dances on the street and looks very untidy. She would shout at them when they cared for her, so they decided to let her go. She would have wanted to go to school but her mother didn't care. Their house got burned together with her birth certificate and barangay clearance, which are needed for her to go to school. She thought she didn't have alternatives anymore. She was fifteen years old when she got a job. She has to make false documents for her age. She worked as a food server who caters to food at the call center offices at the IT Park. The salary was very low. It was one hundred fifty pesos a day only, with no free snacks and food. She has to buy the food, which is a bit expensive. She didn't reach one month with the job. Her sister is also a user. Nobody cares if they wandered around with friends; nobody guided them as they grew up.

Belle's experience was another story. Since fourth grade, her mother usually compares her with her younger brother. There are subjects that her younger brother excels and she will try her best to get high grades. When she reached high school,

comparison continues. During that time, her mother's attention was focus mostly on the two younger siblings. She felt that when she commits a mistake it's a serious situation. Similarly, Ella was not able to finish my first year high school because her mother was so busy attending to her brother who was imprisoned. They are eight in the family but unfortunately four died and four are alive.

The Girl in Trouble meets the Knight in Shining Armor:

The familial difficulties lead to erroneous realizations. Ellamet a man while she was hanging around in her cousins' house. He became her boyfriend with the permission from his father. Ariellefound a man who is a friend of her sister, and the son of her stepmother. Sending regards to each other ended up with being lovers for more than two years. Belle said she was not rebelling but she feels her parents love the three younger siblings more. She found that her friends understood her, especially her boyfriend. The stressful situation was her turning point, but she had no intention of committing a mistake. She was in distress and he told her to sleep, then she had no memory of what happened. She was still grateful the mistake she did even though her mother was castigating her.

The Perfect Girl is Gone: The family's view of the girl they thought was innocent and perfect suddenly disappeared after they knew of the mistake they committed.

Arielle family got very angry upon knowing that she got pregnant, they condemned her and told her to leave their house. Her grandfather told her to let the father spend for her delivery and other needs during pregnancy. When Belle felt that she was pregnant, she was apprehensive for she knew her family will get angry. She decided to tell them on the second month of pregnancy. She was slapped by her mother and was told to leave. She castigated her. However, her father said to just let them be. They immediately called her boyfriend, who came together with his sister, as his parents are not from the area. On the other hand, Ella's boyfriend joined her family when he knew she was pregnant because he wanted to have a child.

Letting the Storm Rage On: These girls stood strong amidst the challenge of growing up at the same time growing a baby inside. Arielle told his boyfriend to look for a job. However, he just worked for a short period of time and currently, he is not working. Right now they have separated since he doesn't have a job. She thought that the most important thing is he has to find a job to support the child. Belle faced the challenge. She decided to transfer to night school in the same institution. When she reported to school, everybody was wondering why she has to transfer to night school from her usual morning schedule. When they knew her situation, she felt comfortable though her classmates without any comments accepted her. However, there was one who started to insult her but she did not mind her instead befriended her to avoid getting stressed. Her boyfriend has to find a job to support for her needs during prenatal and others. He got a temporary job with very low pay. This caused them to have arguments because of financial concerns. They needed money for supplements as well as milk and fruits. She told him that if ever he can't find a permanent job their future son will starve. He did find a regular job as a security guard with a stable salary. Every payday they have to divide it, half of it is with her and the other half is for payment for his food and some debts especially from his sisters.

The money she received was spent for the needs of the baby. He also joined a sinking fund for additional preparation for the delivery.

The Storm didB other her: Despite the happiness that a new life brings to her, it cannot be denied that a part of her would have wanted to return to her teenage life. Ella said she was happy when she delivered her child but she confessed that there are times she would feel she regret what happened. She envied others who go to school, still single and hang around with friends, which she cannot do anymore. She envies girls of her age. So, when her child is asleep she wanders too, when she gets home her boyfriend would ask where she has been. She would quarrel with him when she feels lazy doing things for the household. He knows that her mindset is still like a young girl. He would comment that she is not taking care of the child.

Arielle regretted having a child at this stage of her life. She thought that maybe this is the result of her frequent wandering and contradicting the instructions of her grandfather and sisters, making her a teenage mother. She felt the burden of having a child. But she also sees it positively as it allowed her to stay at home more often. And for her, the child is a God-given grace, because it is a boy and they didn't have any male sibling. If ever her friends will ask her to go with them, she refuses and just don't mind what they will say. She said she couldn't leave her son to others just like what her mother did to them.

One week after Belle delivered her baby, she went back to school and was advised that she will be allowed to join the commencement exercise. Her mother wants her to join the graduation rites and offered to take care of her son while she is in school. She would pump to express breast milk so she can leave it with her mother. She was thinking of terminating school sometimes since nobody will tend to her child especially during school. But, her partner will not permit her since he doesn't like her to be like him who did not finish school. She has to look after her child especially during nighttime and early morning depriving her of peaceful sleep at night. The hardship of tending a baby is exhausting, for her. Seeing others her age playing, going for a stroll made her even more envious. However, she realized that she has to accept that she is now a mother and has an obligation to nurture and raise a child decently and appropriately.

To Rise like the Break of Dawn: Life may seemed harsh but still they are hoping for the brighter future to come. Belle said her boyfriend said he is supportive of her decisions. At this point, she is confident that she is ready to face the responsibility of becoming a mother. She plans to use birth control measures and explained to his boyfriend that it's laborious giving birth and it is expensive and the expenses of rearing a child is also costly. Ella hopes to go back to school. Only that the records needed are not on hand. Once everything is okay, she hopes to finish school. Arielle plans to focus her time and attention to her son. She wanted to raise the child well. She is not closing her doors to new relationships. She plans to entertain suitors when she is ready and when the child is grown up. Happy ending may yet be far for these girls turned into mothers. The fairy tale they lived in may not be typical. But happy ending is still to come. Young as they are, they beamed with hopes that life will still afford them with the things they hoped for.

DISCUSSION

Pregnancy and childbirth is usually planned and wanted, however, for many adolescents, they are not. These pregnancies are more likely in poor, uneducated and rural communities. Some girls lack the knowledge on the prevention of pregnancy. This maybe due to the feelings of shame brought about by seeking information on contraception services. While other may not have the capacity to purchase or do not have the access to these services. This is compounded by the fact that it is not universally accepted for teenagers to go into sexual activities, much more is asking information on how to prevent pregnancy (World Health Organization, 2014). Teenage is often a period of great pressure to make friends and fit in with their peers. The peer pressure often causes teens to let their friends influence their decision to have sex even when they do not fully understand the consequences associated with the act. Teenagers have sex as a way to appear cool and sophisticated, but in some cases the end result is an unplanned teen pregnancy. The Kaiser Family Foundation states that more than 29 percent of pregnant teens reported that they felt pressured to have sex, and 33 percent of pregnant teens stated that they felt that they were not ready for a sexual relationship, but proceeded anyway because they feared ridicule or rejection (Langham, 2015). Parents play a crucial role. There is greater chance for teen girls to get pregnant if the parents can only give limited guidance or none at all. The busy live of parents deprives the teens of their guidance and support making them unable to make good decisions on issues such as sex. When a teen does not feel that she can talk to her parents about sex either because they forbid sex talk or because they are not around, she will more than likely turn to friends for direction on whether or not to have sex, resulting in misinformation and possible teen pregnancy (Langham, 2015).

Parental reactions to the news of a teen pregnancy include denial, guilt and anger; emotions often shared by the pregnant teen. The young father and his family can also experience similar feelings, according to the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry. Depending on the family's religious beliefs and social network, fear of being rejected or even ostracized can come into play. Many parents of a pregnant adolescent perceive the situation as a negative reflection on their own parenting skills. The pregnant teen can become depressed, which can also have a negative impact on the family's overall emotional well-being. On the positive side, many families reach a point of acceptance, focusing their emotional energies on welcoming the infant and helping the teenager move forward with her life and education after the birth (Ezell, 2017). Adolescent pregnancy can also have negative social and economic effects on girls, their families and communities. Many girls who become pregnant have to drop out of school. A girl with little or no education has fewer skills and opportunities to find a job. This can also have an economic cost with a country losing out on the annual income a young woman would have earned over her lifetime, if she had not had an early pregnancy (World Health Organization, 2014). Uncertainty about the future may arise when a teen is pregnant. A teen may feel she does not have enough knowledge to be a mother. She may also have fears about how having a baby will impact her own life and dreams for the future. Education may be put on hold when a teen becomes pregnant. Some pregnant teens may decide to leave high school. Others who were planning to attend college in the future may put off that experience after becoming pregnant.

They may decide to focus on the baby or getting married rather than pursuing further education (Bodeeb, 2017). Depression may arise when a teenager is pregnant. The teen may fall into a depression while trying to handle the emotions pregnancy creates and all of the possibly negative feedback about the pregnancy from friends and family. The fluctuating hormones that a pregnancy causes may also prompt depression (Bodeeb, 2017). Once their baby is born, teenagers may not be willing or able to give it the undivided attention it needs. A teen may not be an adequate mother because she is overwhelmed by the constant needs of the baby. She may grow annoyed at the lack of freedom to interact with her peer group due to the baby (Bodeeb, 2017). Financial difficulty may arise during a teen pregnancy or after the baby is born. It is expensive to raise a baby. Teens who do not have full-time employment may struggle to cover the basic expenses of life upon having a baby (Bodeeb, 2017). A teenager's pregnancy might reduce her mother's achievement expectations for her other children. Parents often are initially disappointed when a teenage daughter gives birth, but they may perceive younger siblings as having potential for success. Realizing that the older daughter's school and job options are likely to be limited, parents might have even more demanding expectations of their other children (East, 1999).

Conclusion

Narration of the lives of teenage mothers provided appreciation of the struggles they've been through. This sheds the light on the realities they face because of the harsh transition from being a girl to eventually becoming a young mother. Deprived of life's opportunities because of one single mistake, they still hope for a brighter future. Looking into stories allows greater understanding of these views that they had and provides outline of the transition to a new role.

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