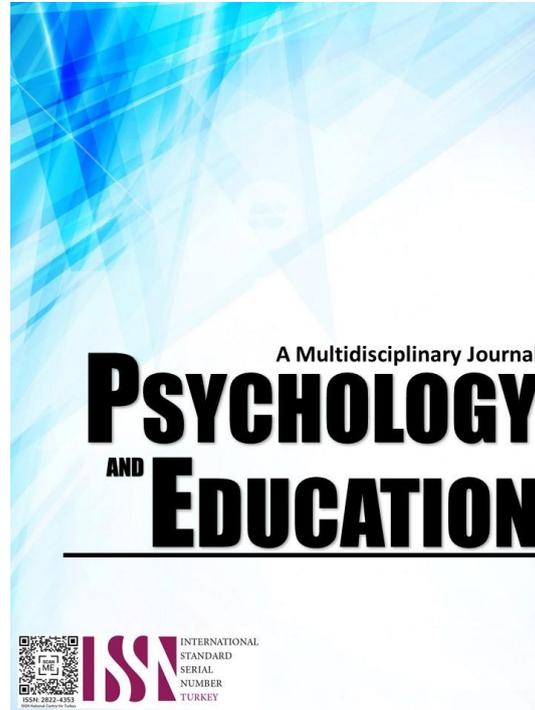


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The Lived Experiences of Teenage Fathers: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative- phenomenological research is to discuss, explore and explain the lived experiences of teenage fathers. The participants are residing in various barangays of Kabankalan City, specifically Barangay 1, Barangay 2, and Barangay 3. Using purposive sampling, five (5) participants who became fathers during their teenage years were identified. Phenomenology was used to identify the following textural themes: (a) hanging out with friends; (b) financial hardships; (c) positive changes brought about by fatherhood; and (d) realizations of being a father. The essence of this study can be metaphorically likened to a marble sculptor and the sculpted marble—where one shapes life through aspirations and adjustments as the art of sculpting unfolds. The findings of this study imply the significant turn of events in the life of the participants and the realizations from the lessons they have learned as teenage fathers.

Keywords: *teenage fathers, lived experiences, phenomenology*

Introduction

Teenage fatherhood involves risk factors and circumstances that could easily escalate into disadvantages over the life course (Assini-Meytin, Garza, & Green, 2019). Teen fathers had lower initial education levels and skills, hourly compensation, and annual wages, and a greater likelihood of involvement in a variety of risky behaviors than their non-father peers (Pirog, Jung, & Lee, 2018). Moreover, becoming a father at the right age is different from becoming a dad at a young age. When you're a teenager, the world continues to be mysterious and full of unanswered questions. When one is at the height of self-discovery is between the ages of 13 and 19. Being a father at this time will be challenging. There will be no one else to turn to throughout the experience when discussing family life because what the teenage father is experiencing differs much from that of an adult father. As one becomes a teenage parent, their level of maturity, pressure, and education will be put to the test (Sajul, Paras, & Sumargo, 2014).

Teen fathers were reconstructed apiece experiences led by paternity. They are the economic provider for the child and cultivate paternity roles inside the family. However, most teenage fathers were molded to be good, paying attention to, and passionate fathers despite their challenges to meet the financial needs of their adolescents. Teen fathers are mostly projected to attain learning to deal with their children (Madiba & Nsiki, 2017). The Covid-19 pandemic even made things worst. This public health crisis triggered a change in a multitude of ways including roles in the family and mental health (Feinberg et al., 2021). Prior

societal inequities were exacerbated and social, political, and financial vulnerabilities were uncovered, consequently enhancing the effects of the pandemic (Larki, Sharifi, & Roudsari, 2021). An already vulnerable population because of limited social, economic, environmental, and organizational support, teen fathers are expected to adapt to their parenting roles and provide for their children (Recto & Lesser, 2020).

The social disadvantages that many young fathers experience mean that adhering to contemporary cultural expectations of involved and engaged fatherhood can be difficult to fulfill (Dermott & Miller, 2015). Even before the pandemic, many young fathers were navigating a complex variety of relational, socio-economic, and environmental challenges, some of which constrained their aspirations towards involvement. Yet regardless of their young age, gender, and resources, young fathers still express their intentions to “be there” for their children and engage in a variety of strategies to achieve this (Neale et al., 2015).

The phenomenon of teenage fatherhood may have these aforementioned stereotypes and scenarios, but it can also have individual contexts and insights. Considering all these, the current study objective is to investigate the standpoint of teen fathers that deals with their experiences of fatherhood, related concerns and challenges, results, and implications it has added to their lives. This is done with the intent of contributing to a deeper comprehension of their experiences as teenage fathers.

Methodology

This study will use the qualitative phenomenological approach. The lived experiences of teenage fathers and the issues and concerns they are dealing with will be the main subjects of this study. Phenomenology seeks to extrapolate reality based on the experiences of the participants. It describes and captures the meaning and essence of the lived experiences of an individual or a group (Hortillas & Gayoles 2018).

Instead of testing preconceived hypotheses on a wider sample, this qualitative study aims to understand the frames of reference of a limited number of participants (Hortillas & Gayoles, 2018). Additionally, Field (2013) mentioned that qualitative studies have garnered increased attention due to the richer portrayal of the data garnered. Descriptions and statements provided from the experiences of the participants can be used to interpret the meaning of the phenomenon (Thapa, 2016).

This study involves five (5) Teenage Fathers living in the area of Kabankalan City, Negros Occidental as the participants, in consideration of their identity and confidentiality they will be named Alfred, Andy, Harry, James, and Joe. Wherein we will ask the participants about their lived experiences as teenage fathers.

The Individual Written Narrative Story Form was used in this study.

Among the many ways of collecting the participants' detailed descriptions of their experiences in qualitative research; the written and oral self-reports were used and evaluated as data containing their authentic experiences from them (Degillo, 2022).

The validity and reliability of this study were established by the participants during the data collection and data analysis. The results and interpretations are returned to the participants for confirmation and validation through member checking. Therefore, the results and interpretations of the interviews might be handed over to the interviewees to confirm the content of what they have stated during the interview encounter. In this manner, the plausibility and veracity of the information can be

recognized and supported (Zohrabi, 2013).

The researchers met and discussed the research topic. This was followed by a discussion of what specific objectives would best serve the research's relevance and purpose. Following the identification of the target participants, interviewing guide questions were created. An expert validated the content of the interview questions. The participants' consent was also obtained, and it was made plain to them that they could withdraw their participation at any moment and that the researcher would treat all information gathered for the study with the utmost confidentiality and anonymity. The participants were also made aware that they would be contacted again if more information was required. The recorded interviews were individually transcribed to come up with an extended text and underwent verbatim transcription (Hortillas & Gayoles, 2018).

Data Analysis

Explication is explaining and analyzing data while keeping the whole detail. (Hortillas & Gayoles, 2018). An analysis is a systematic process of identifying essential features and relationships by transforming the data through interpretation (Hortillas & Gayoles, 2018; Degillo, 2022). The explication process includes the following: (a) bracketing and phenomenological reduction; (b) Delimitation of units of meaning; (c) Grouping of units of meaning into themes. (d) summarizing, validating, and modifying each of the written narratives; (e) forming common and unique themes for all written narratives and composite summaries, (f) and finally defining the essence of the experience (Hortillas & Gayoles, 2018).

Bracketing and Phenomenological Reduction. The phenomenological reduction is the method of going back to experience as it is, and it is the method before or the pre-method to eidetic intuition. It is the method of suspending intellectual judgment and bracketing or shutting down our cognitive abilities. The researcher has bracketed points in the narrative. The bracketing is done in a way that avoids taking a stand for or against the researchers' assumptions, and meanings and interpretations do not get into the world of the participants (Hortillas & Gayoles, 2018).

Delineating Units of Meaning. Statements seen illuminate the phenomenon under study and were recorded; minorities (knowledge off-topic) have been identified and removed to focus on the essentials. The list of relevant units of meaning was taken from each written narrative; has been carefully analyzed and

redundant units have been eliminated (Hortillas & Gayoles, 2018). The conceptualization organized the data in a meaningful way; Clarifications were conducted with participants to establish the credibility of the data (Neuman, 2014).

Clustering of Units of Meanings to form Themes.

The researcher carefully examined the list of units of meaning. Grouping units of meaning into thematic clusters and identifying significant themes, also called units of meaning (Hortillas & Gayoles, 2018). Through hermeneutics, ie interpreting the structural meaning of words; Themes have been created. By exploring the meaning of the different clusters, key themes were identified which in turn would express the essence of those clusters. Here the what, or so-called structural qualities, and the how, or structural accounts, were established to create the themes. These topics create empirical knowledge. Conscious support of the emerging knowledge about the meaning of the participants' experience (Husserl, 1964).

Summarizing Each of the Written Narrative Stories, Validate, and Modify.

The comprehensive context was provided through a synopsis that included all the themes that emerged from the participants' narratives (Hortillas & Gayoles, 2018). Reconstruction of the inner world of experience and the meaning of the lived experiences of young fathers. The researcher performed a validation check at this point. Through member verification, five participants validated the abstract; the researcher asked participants for opinions on the credibility of the issues and interpretations (Creswell, 2012). Changes were made based on validation by the five participants.

Forming General and Unique Themes for all the Written Narrative Stories and Composite Summary.

Themes common to most or all written narratives, as well as the individual variations, have been identified. The meaning found in each participant's units and themes was explored to represent the experiences of adolescent fathers (Hortillas & Gayoles, 2018). The researcher ended the explication by writing a composite summary. A rich, thick description is observed that represents the purpose of information portability (Creswell, 2012).

Defining the Essence. The essence consisted of the basic qualities that let the teenage fathers experience what it is. Describe the lived experiences of involved teenage fathers using language that might convey meaning. This phenomenological study used language as data and reported essence through the use of metaphor (Hortillas & Gayoles, 2018). Hence the

definition of the essence of experience reaches the core of the phenomenological process.

Results and Discussion

There are four major textural themes found in the individual written narrative stories of the participants. The major textural themes that emerged from the lived experiences of teenage fathers in Kabankalan City categorized by question are Hangout with friends; Financial Hardships; Positive Changes brought about by fatherhood; and Realizations of being a teenage father.

Life Before Teenage Fatherhood

Hangouts with friends was the major textural theme found in the individual written narrative stories of the participants in the response to the question "What is your life before or before being a teenage father?"

Hangouts with friends

Before teenage fatherhood, most of the participants tend to enjoy more of their time on hangouts and leisure activities. They were spending their time with their friends and doing extracurricular activities that lead to different kinds of relief. Alfred mentioned that before being a teenage father, it is all right to hang out anywhere and join contests together with his friends. He wrote, "*Sang una okay pa nga ma ka lakwatsa or yaga-yaga biskan diin upod mo imo barkada, pangayaw contest.*" (Before, it is all right for me to go out and stroll around wherever I want with my friends and join the contest.)

The phenomenological approach substantiates participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and feelings about a phenomenon (Yksel & Yldrm, 2015). The person's reasoning and explication of the experience provide crucial insight into the meaning of the experience (Maulana, Rohman, & Prabowo, 2022). During the adolescent period there are many changes in males' teenage life physically, psychologically, and socially. Spending time with friends and peers has become a sort of leisure and fun for male teenage life. Teenagers become more capable of abstract thinking and want to experience many things (Yusuf, 2019). As your teen begins to strive for freedom and control, they are typically experiencing various changes in their physical, social, and emotional outgrowth. Teenagers need to learn important life skills such as practical skills, emotional skills, and financial skills for their future. Additionally, teenagers need to go through

challenging experiences to sharpen and shape their characters (Elsworthy, 2019).

Financial Responsibilities and Teenage Fatherhood

Financial hardships were the major textural theme found in the individual written narrative stories of the participants in the response to the question “What are your experiences as a teenage father?”

Financial Hardships

Most of our respondents are still pursuing their education. Having a child at an early age is a great responsibility, especially as the head of the family. One must have a job to sustain daily needs. They experienced lots of difficulties and challenges especially in managing their time and finding ways to earn money even though they are still under the custody of their parents and their partner’s parents. They are trying their best to cope with their studies and to provide for their families.

Andi mentioned how he struggled on his finances, *“Kabudlay mangita kwarta kay wala pako ka graduate ngita lang bisan ano nga ubra basta ma kwartahan kag sang mga bag o palang gid akon mga bata kabudlay kag kakapoy mag pulaw bugtaw bisan tuod gabuligay man kami sang asawa ko pero ara dyapon ang kakapoy kay gangita ka kwarta sa aga, sa gab e mabantay ka kag kis a kinanlan mo gid magpulaw bantay.”* (It’s hard to look for money since I’m undergraduate. Hence, I look for any job just to earn. In the early days of our newborn, I experienced the difficulties of staying up all night - sleep nights. I and my partner had to look for resources in the morning and staying up at night attending the needs of our newborn.)

Erikson (1968) perceived adolescence as a transitional phase in development from childhood to adulthood. He also wrote at a time when college attendance was less common than it is today; This has direct implications because of the emphasis he placed on professional identity. It can be hypothesized that Erikson’s version of adolescence refers to an aging period roughly associated with middle and high school: 12 to 18 years. Identity is what makes you move in a direction; it is what gives you a reason to be. Erikson believed that a solid sense of identity was crucial for further development. Not everyone succeeds in this developmental task, but teenagers and young adults who are sufficiently settled in their identity can have this sense of risk-taking and embark on a quest for intimacy (Hoffer, 2022).

Paternity commitment contributes to their children’s financial support that provides benefits for their children (Higgs, Gomez-Vidal, & Austin, 2018). There are practical issues that teenage fathers face, including support needs and experiences with professional support (Clayton, 2016). Early parenthood limited education and employment, and the association was slightly weaker for men (Johansen, Nielsen, & Verner, 2019). Young fathers often face a greater number of economic and professional challenges compared to older fathers; Strong associations have been reported between young parenthood and lack of participation in education, training, or employment, increasing the risk of persistent poverty and economic insecurity. Stack & Meredith (2018) described food and energy poverty and the need for parents to make sacrifices to ensure children’s basic needs are met. In some cases, participants went without food and struggled to pay bills. Among several common parental stressors, financial hardship formed the strongest associations with reported parental psychological distress, particularly factors related to mortgages/housing and job security (Taylor et al., 2017). Clayton (2016) found that becoming a father at such a young age came with obvious difficulties and struggles ranging from finances, employment, family support, and child-rearing. By immediately finding employment and some training, they broke the stereotype previously held that teenage fathers were not involved in their children’s lives. To better prepare teenagers for fatherhood, not only the mother but also the father should be involved in the availability of services and resources.

Positive Changes and the Rise of a Father

Positive changes brought about by fatherhood are the major textural theme found in the individual written narrative stories of the participants to the questions “What are the significant changes that you have encountered in your life being a teenage father?”

Positive Changes and the Rise of a Father

Teenage fathers reported personal changes that were brought about by becoming a father. Most of the participants stated that becoming a father and having a family at an early age was not part of their plans and it was not easy. However, their behavior and lifestyle changed significantly and positively. There was an abrupt transition in their feelings and roles. They become more mature and responsible. Most of them were hands-on in raising their children even though some of them are working and studying. The transition from a boy into a father influenced them to be more mature and responsible people. It gives them direction

because they think of becoming a good father to their children.

Most teen fathers were transformed by the experiences and that forced them to change their behavior and lifestyle for the better. Their perceptions of a good father were limited to providing financial support for their child. They also believed that they would be good fathers to their children once they get employment (Madiba & Nsiki, 2017). Parents play an important role in promoting healthy lifestyles in their children through behavior modeling and creating a healthy environment with nutritious food and opportunities for physical activity. Often overlooked as a behavior change tool for the family, father involvement can contribute to lifestyle behavioral changes (Arlinghaus & Johnston, 2017). Furthermore, the fathers indicated that whatever decision or action they take, they have their families before them (Gurkan, Ummanel & Koran, 2021). Fathers often bring with them a sense of personal growth, maturity, and sensitivity as a result of the transition to fatherhood. Fathers' difficulties in expressing feelings they perceive as negative could affect their consistency and confidence. A father effectively participates in the physical and emotional care of the child (Moraes & Granato 2017).

Teenage Fatherhood: the Realizations and Insights

Realizations of being a teenage father brought by major textural themes found in the individual written narrative stories of the participants to the questions "Through this experience that you have mentioned, what life lessons and realizations have you learned so far?"

Realizations of being a teenage father

Through their experiences, teenage fathers recognized the importance of good decision-making skills. They have gained lessons and realized many things about life.

Alfred mentioned showing sensible ideas to his expectation. *"First, being realistic in the sense that I am the showing sensible and practical idea of what I expected...Second, being simple sa panggawi, simple sa pagtubang sa tawo ara balang wala standard mga ginatawag...then lastly, being humble...that somehow I can bring this as my treasure biskan amo lang ni ang indi madula sa akon asta magdalagko ang imo bata."* (First, being realistic in the sense that I am showing a sensible and practical idea of what I expected...Second, being simple in my life, in facing people. Then lastly, being humble...that somehow I

can bring this as my treasure even just as simple as this that will not be taken away from me until my child grows older."

Andy realized how hard being a teenage father *"kabudlay gale tuod kung may bata kana kag isa pa wala ka permanente nga ubra mabudlayan ka gid. Mas mayu nga may ubra kana kag mayu na imo pangabuhi antes ka mag intra sa amo sina."* (Truly, it is hard to raise a child when you don't have resources and income. Hence, it is good to have a job first and good life before engaging to something like this.)

Ecological Systems Theory offers a holistic approach that encompasses all systems in which each person participates and that accurately reflects the dynamics of actual family relationships (Hayes, OToole, & Halpenny, 2017). From this perspective, individuals, including teenagers, are inseparable from their environment and the systems that surround them, e.g. the digital age (Navarro, 2022). Therefore, any intervention aimed at preventing or changing behavior (e.g., those addressing the context and dynamics of adolescent fathers) must focus on changes in the environmental system to be most effective. In essence, Bronfenbrenner's theory explains the influence of systems in which a developing child is directly involved (e.g., teacher training) and those that have influence but do not involve anyone in the child's immediate environment (e.g., public health policy changes, cultural changes (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). In the context of teenage fathers, Bronfenbrenner's theory explains their active role in the process, context, and timing of their experience (Popovic, 2022).

Fatherhood brings with it a positive perception of caring for and supporting the children, along with underlying new commitments to the child. This aspect suggests that fathers perceive positively the concern to supply the needs of their children in the upbringing and care process (Gurkan, Ummanel & Koran, 2021) They experience anxiety, insecurities, significant changes in their routines, physical and social isolation at the same time high parental stress (Nazish, Zeshan & Pervaiz, 2020). Furthermore, fathers' involvement in leisure activities, daily counseling, and college counseling, as well as their warm, receptive, and rejecting, restrictive parenting behaviors were found to be significant variables affecting child happiness (Jang & Sang, 2016).

The essence of being a teenage father

The essence of this study can be metaphorically

likened to a marble sculptor and the sculpted marble—where one shapes life through aspirations and adjustments as the art of sculpting unfolds. For this specific context, the marble sculptor captures the teenage father with his lived experiences. The marble sculptor is trying to carve a lion- the life, dreams, aspirations, and desires of a male teenager. But upon sculpting, there are forces exerted that made the marble break off. Those forces pull the life of a male teenager into the shape of fatherhood. The marble breaks in the form of hardships and adjustments in finding ways to earn and find a job to sustain their family. The marble sculptor notice small details that formed petals. The scrutiny made him look for the positive changes brought by fatherhood. He continued his work until it creates a beautiful sunflower. The continuity and a beautiful sunflower are the realizations of being a teenage father that enables them to shape, create and make valuable experiences. Seeing marble sculptor as a life experience of a teenage father there are hardships, changes, and realizations. As Alex Carrel quoted, *“Man cannot remake himself without suffering, for he is both the marble and the sculptor.”*

Visual Representation of the Essence of Teenage Fatherhood



Implication

Teenage fathers faced various circumstances before and after they became a father. They more often encountered changes, difficulties, and realizations in life due to fatherhood responsibilities. The findings of this study determined that most teenage fathers are wanting to cope with the changes brought by fatherhood and learn to adjust to find earnings. It explicates teenage fathers and goes in-depth about the meaning of their experiences through phenomenology.

Teenagers are challenged to be guided with proper orientation and sex education. Teenage fathers are in most need of a support system from their environment that includes family, society, and social relationships. Moreover, those circles that they have could lessen the burden or add up with the pressures they are experiencing. This expresses the value of understanding teenage fathers and caring for our youth. Understanding on experiences of being a teenage father is not easy. Developing care for the youth to evade sexual engagement instead promote and foster meaningful social involvement. Lastly, the changes and realizations brought by fatherhood are beneficial in becoming responsible fathers in expressing and enduring parental roles.

Conclusion

The study used the phenomenological approach to explore and describe the experiences of teenage fathers. Common themes for the lived experiences of teenage fathers are Hang-out with friends; Financial Hardships; Positive Changes cause by fatherhood; and Realizations of being a teenage father.

Before teenage fatherhood, most of our respondents tend to enjoy more of their time on hangouts and leisure activities. They are spending most of their time with their friends and different kinds of relief.

Having a child at an early age has various adjustments due to responsibilities especially being a father as the head of the family. One must have a job to sustain their daily needs. They experience lots of difficulties and challenges especially in managing their attention and time for the child and finding ways to earn money even though they are still under the custody of their parents. Being a father at an early age is tiring especially when you are not yet ready however, our respondents had a positive outlook despite the hardships of being a teen father.

Teenage fathers reported positive changes that were brought about by becoming a father. There was an

abrupt transition in their feelings and role. The transition from a male teenager to a teen father influenced them to be more mature and responsible.

Through these experiences, teenage fathers recognized the significance of good decision-making skills. They have gained lessons and realized many things about life. Those realizations addressed to have wise decision-making before engaging in teenage fatherhood.

Moreover, this study recommends the Ecological Systems, Role Occupancy Perspective, and Developmental Theory as a framework that helps explain and understand the lived experiences of teenage fathers based on the context of these theories, the researchers can grasp and reflect on the situations and experiences of teenage fathers. It also commends phenomenology as a field of study that assists researchers in gaining an in-depth understanding of the meaning of participants' lived experiences.

The protection of teenagers from a life of early parenthood is advocated by this study. Male teenagers may have a glimpse of lived experiences of teenage fathers and grasp the significance of child liabilities. Parents and guardians may play an important role in the reinforcement of youthful activities in male teenage life. Teenagers who want to become teen fathers may understand in this study that there is a great responsibility in becoming a father at an early age. The significant turning point of life from a male teenager to a teenage father may be evident if they consider the findings and advocacies of this study.

The discoveries of this study may move Guidance Counselors together with BS Psychology students to initiate programs that may assist teenage fathers who are still schooling and those who stop their education due to parenthood. Through the help of guidance counselors, they may propose a program intended for teenage fathers along with the community.

The study proposes the Early Parenthood Educational Sessions (EPES) which will be facilitated by BS Psychology students with proper guidance from school counselors and administrators. This study proposes the following advocacies: a) Addressing concerns and issues of teen fathers, and b) Parenthood Educational Sessions- coping and managing early parental responsibilities.

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