

# The Only Exception: Teenage Pregnancy in the Philippines

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## **ABSTRACT**

Teenage pregnancy rates across the Asia Pacific Region has declined over the past two decades, except in the Philippines. The alarming situation continues despite the effort of the Philippine government to pass laws and implement programs related to reproductive health. Drawing from feminist theory and through photo-elicitation, this paper explores how teenage mothers see and understand adolescent sexuality, romantic relationships, and motherhood. By capturing these realms from the perspective of the teenage mothers and locating it at the community level, the author presents a nuanced understanding of the previously established analyses on the causes and effects of teenage pregnancy in the Philippines.

**Keywords:** teenage pregnancy, Philippines, feminist standpoint theory, photo-elicitation

## INTRODUCTION: IS THE STUDY OF TEENAGE PREGNANCY PASSÉ?

Teenage pregnancy was first problematized in the 1950s by developed countries, particularly the United States (Cherry & Dillon, 2013). According to Frank Furstenberg, a sociologist who studied teenage pregnancy among African Americans for more than four decades, the development of teenage pregnancy as a social problem follows what Anthony Downs calls the “issue attention cycle” (Furstenberg, 2007, p. 7) where in, attention rises from “social invisibility” in the “pre-problem stage” to a period of “alarmed discovery and euphoric excitement” when confidence about illuminating the problem is high. Next, as policymakers and the public come to recognize the costs of making significant progress, public interest wanes, and this gradual decline is a prelude to a twilight period when reformers confront social and political resistance. Finally, Downs identifies a post-problem stage of “lesser attention or spasmodic re-occurrence of interest.”

To contextualize the issue attention cycle globally, it is helpful to trace back changes in family formation and valuing of children from the agriculture economy to the post-World War II (WWII) baby boom era. During the period when families were dependent on the land as a source of food and livelihood, having children meant having additional labor force in the farm – which implies that children are economic assets. However, due to the global industrial and structural changes after WWII, children in industrialized nations became economic liabilities to their families and to the state. Hence, during the transition towards a market economy, ideal age for marriage and parenthood rose and teenage pregnancy was identified as a social problem (Bulatao, 1981; Easterlin & Crimmins, 1985). Having recognized this, various solutions to prevent teenage pregnancy has been implemented, mostly in the developed countries – from sex education to use of contraceptives to abortion to adoption mechanisms. In the 1990s, teenage pregnancy rates dropped significantly in most American and European regions (Dillon & Cherry, 2014).

To say that it is no longer a serious problem is however an understatement among developing countries. At present, studies on teenage pregnancy can still be found in almost every field: sociology, demography,

psychology, biology, medicine, and public policy. Concerns from these fields include the relationship between teenage pregnancy and factors such as educational attainment (Diez & Mistry 2010; Kane, Morgan, Harris, & Guilkey, 2013), access to reproductive health services (Mann, 2013; Minguez, Santelli, Gibson, & Orr, 2015), relationship with the mother (Meade, Kershaw, & Ickovics, 2008; Paskiewicz, 2001), socio-economic status (Dehlendorf, Marchi, Vittinghoff, & Braveman, 2010; Udjo, 2013), and sexual behaviors (Marteleto, Lam, & Ranchhod, 2008; Oluwole, Marinda, Cortez, & Saadat, 2015). At the institutional level, the United Nations, World Health Organization (WHO), and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), puts attention to teenage pregnancy as a development issue. According to WHO (2014, p. 2), "The Global Strategy for Women's and Children's health, launched by the United Nations Secretary-General in 2010, it is important to address the health and welfare of adolescent girls in order to achieve the fifth Millennium Development Goal on maternal mortality reduction." Continuous efforts are being made through large-scale research and partnerships with organizations (local, national, and non-governments) to prevent teenage pregnancy. Having said this, the need for studying it is still present and the loudest call can be heard among the poorest regions.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY: EXPLORING TEENAGE PREGNANCY**

Labels on life stages are so complex that they vary from region to region. For the sake of clarity, I will categorize youth, adolescent, and teenager according to age group. The youth, generally, refers to people from ages 15 to 24 (United Nations, 1981) who are under a transition from a dependent child to an independent adult (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2017). Adolescents on the other hand are divided into two stages. According to UNICEF (2011, p. 6), early adolescence is from ages 10 to 14, where "physical changes generally commence, usually beginning with a growth spurt and soon followed by the development of the sex organs and secondary sexual characteristics," while late adolescence is from ages 15 to 19 where "major

physical changes have usually occurred.” Lastly, teenagers are those who are in the -teen years which is from 13 to 19. Adolescent and teenager are inter-changeably used although most reports on teenage pregnancy covers those who are in the late adolescence stage (United Nations Population Fund, UNESCO, & WHO, 2015; UNICEF, 2008).

The 2015 report of UNFPA reveals that teenage pregnancy rates across the Asia Pacific Region has declined over the past two decades except in one country: Philippines. Reported cases of teenage pregnancy in the country increased by 70% from 2000 to 2010 (Manila Standard, 2013; Philippine Statistics Authority, 2015; Santos, 2017) while an estimate of 580 babies are born to teenage mothers daily from 2011 to 2014 (PSA, 2015). The alarming situation continues despite the effort of the Philippine government to pass laws and practice programs related to reproductive health such as the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012 (RA 10354), Magna Carta of Women (RA 9710), and Population Awareness and Sex Education (PASE) by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

Drawing from feminist theory and through photo-elicitation, this paper explores how teenage mothers in the Philippine see and accept adolescent sexuality, romantic relationships, and motherhood. By capturing these realms from the perspective of the teenage mothers and locating it in a community level, the author presents a nuanced understanding of the previously established analyses on the causes and effects of teenage pregnancy. Teenage mothers will be referred here as adolescents who got pregnant between the ages 13 to 19.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY: SEEING THROUGH THE LENS OF TEENAGE MOTHERS**

The views of teenage mothers on adolescent sexuality, romantic relationships, and motherhood were analyzed using feminist standpoint theory (FST). It works on the proposition that facts on women’s lives that have been suppressed and ignored should be discussed by the public and the women themselves. In FST, the experiences of women are recognized as a legitimate source knowledge, both in practical and theoretical terms.

Further, it puts forward that production of ideas about women should contribute to their own liberation and empowerment (Collins, 1997; Harding, 2004; Hesse-Biber, 2007).

While most studies on teenage pregnancy that followed feminist standpoint theory relied on life story narratives and interviews (Brubaker & Wright, 2006; Dagdag, 2012; Thursby, 2007), this work differs as it utilizes photo-elicitation as its main method. The method allows the research participants to take and use photographs to identify their individual and community concerns and to promote a dialogue to openly discuss and reflect on it (Sutton-Brown, 2014; Wang & Burris, 1997). In a way, this method complements feminist standpoint theory because research participants are empowered as they become a part in the research process by (1) taking photographs which represent their thoughts and (2) reflecting and giving titles, captions, and explanations on the images.

For this study, five participants were identified through snowballing. They were selected based on their ability to articulate ideas and comprehend the objectives. The major steps in conducting the research include: devising initial topics for taking pictures, conducting the photo-elicitation training using digital cameras, taking pictures, selecting photographs for discussion, facilitating group dialogue, and codifying the issues from the discussions. Topics on adolescent sexuality, romantic relationship, and motherhood were presented to the participants through the following guideline: Take a photo/s of any item or place or person which symbolizes or reminds you of (1) sex, (2) your boyfriend/ husband, and (3) a mother.

### **LOCATING THE TEENAGE MOTHERS: TONDO, MANILA**

All the participants in the study are from Tondo. It is the poorest district in Manila and is known for having one of the largest slum areas in the world. As an urban poor community, the district is composed of workers and semi-skilled workers. They experience job insecurity and have irregular source of income. This sector started to increase during the time of President Ferdinand Marcos in 1970s due to liberalization

in economic policies (IBON Foundation, Inc., 2009). In 2010, it was estimated by the United Nations that the urban poor population in the Philippines is composed of about 45.8 million individuals or 14.8 million families. Of this figure, 11.5 million are in Metro Manila, 1.5 million are in Metro Davao, 860,000 are in Metro Cebu, and 854,000 are in Metro Zamboanga (Urban Poor Resource Center of the Philippines, Inc., 2011).

Due to extreme poverty experienced by the urban poor dwellers in Tondo, most, if not all of them, rely on sorting garbages being dumped in the area daily. Through this, they also find pagpag for their families. Pagpag is a Tagalog term which refers to the dust you shake off from clothes or other things when you clean, but for the poorest families in Tondo, the term means left over chicken (or other meats) pulled from garbage disposals of restaurants in Manila (Cabrera, 2008). Clearly, the basic needs (water, food, livelihood, descent shelter, etc.) and rights (health and education) are inaccessible to the residents of Tondo.

## **RESULTS: VIEWS ON SEXUALITY, ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP, AND MOTHERHOOD**

The stories of five teenage mothers will be presented in the succeeding sections. They are based on group and individual discussions, guided by the photographs that they themselves took. Each story uses a pseudonym accompanied by the age of the participant during the time of fieldwork. To capture their ideas on the photos, direct quotes from transcripts and field notes are also included.

### **The story of Jerrica, age 15**

Jerrica is the eldest of six siblings. Due to lack of financial resources, she stopped attending school when she was nine years old. Her father works as scavenger in nearby dump site while her mother looks after their small store and her younger siblings.



FIGURE 1  
Curtains for privacy

“That is our bedroom. I chose that because... that’s where I learned it (about sex)... when he invited me and we did it.” [*Kwarto namin yan. Napili ko ‘yan kasi... diyan ko lang nalaman (ang tungkol sa sex) nung inaya niya ‘ko at ginawa na namin.*]

Their bedroom is part of a communal bedroom for the whole family but has a curtain to distinguish their space, “for privacy” [*para private*] as Jerrica puts it. She had her first boyfriend when she was 12 years old. It is not an issue for her parents because they see it as normal for young people to have special partners. Kevin was her 6th boyfriend. According to her, they developed their mutual feelings while working in a junkshop and they became a couple in June 2014. Kevin is six years older than her. He invited her to have sex in his house during their first anniversary. She agreed because she sees Kevin as her future husband. After two months of missing her period, she told her mother that she might be pregnant. She thought that she would not get pregnant because her Kevin ensured her that he will be careful. She also mentioned in the discussion that everything that she knows about sex was just from Kevin.



FIGURE 2  
Who is she?

“He [Kevin] loves looking at pretty and sexy women in TV and in newspapers.” [*Mahilig siyang magtingin sa mga magaganda at seksi na babae sa TV saka sa dyaryo.*]

Jerrica does not know who the woman (Solenn Heusaff, model and actress) in the poster is but because she is beautiful and sexy, she makes Jerrica remember Kevin. Since Jerrica got pregnant, they decided to live together in Kevin’s house. To get by their daily needs, Kevin works with Jerrica’s father as a scavenger while Jerrica stays at home and waits for whatever her husband will bring her. He works from 5:00 AM to 7:00 PM and earns PhP50.00 to PhP150.00 per day but there are also days when he does not earn at all. Whenever she gets bored of waiting for Kevin, she visits her mother’s house and helps take care of her siblings. The distance between the two houses is very short anyway. Sometimes she looks after her parents’ small sundry store for extra income.





FIGURE 3  
New found friends

“I think motherhood is also related to helping each other in many ways. Like giving advice to other mothers and asking for each one’s condition.” [*Para sa akin, karugtong rin ng pagiging ina ang pagtutulungan... sa ano, maraming pagkakataon. Halimbawa na lang ay pagbibigay ng payo at pagkamusta sa kapwa nanay.*]

She took a photo of other participants because she thinks that it best represents friendship among them. She also added that even if she cannot go outside the community (due to household chores and child rearing tasks) like she used to, she feels secure and satisfied as long as she can see her new friends - who are also teenage mothers. For Jerrica, she can survive motherhood because of the friendship she has with other teenage mothers in their community.

Currently, Jerrica wants to help her parents by looking for a living but she is unable as she is the only one who takes care of her child. She has no plans of going back to school because according to her, it will just cost their family money and time.

### The story of Kristine, age 15

Kristine stopped studying after finishing 5th grade in Vicente Lim Elementary School. Her youngest brother, seven years old, was not able to go to school at all. As the eldest, she takes care of her five siblings while their parents look for money and food as scavengers. Their mother and father leave the house at 5:00 AM and return by 12:00 noon to bring them food then leave again to work until 6:00 PM. Kristine shared with the group that she often sees her mother crying while giving them pagpag or scavenged food. Neighbors call her mother as “the one who got insane due to hunger” [*iyan yung binaliw ng gutom*] but Kristine just ignores them because according to her, “we are all hungry anyway” [*lahat naman kami ay gutom*].

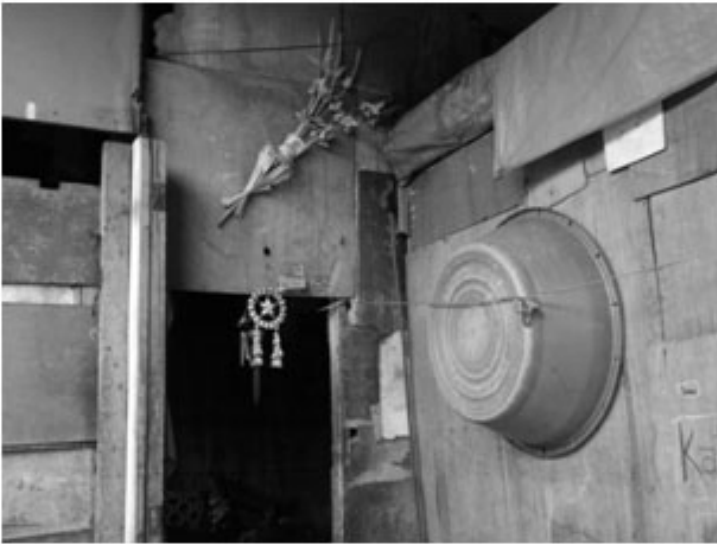


FIGURE 4  
Space for learning

“My friends and I often stay and chat there (in their house)... our friends, who are already mothers, are telling us that it hurts (to have sex) and it makes you nervous... but also feels good at the same time.” [*Diyen kami madalas tumatambay at nagku-kuwentuhan dati...yung mga barkada naming may mga anak na, sinasabing masakit (ang sex) saka nakakakaba... pero masarap rin.*]

If not at her friend's house, Kristine often spends her free time at her boyfriend's house. Jose is her first boyfriend. One time, Jose asked if they can have sex. She got nervous but eventually said yes because she thinks that it is normal for couples to have sex. When she got pregnant, her friends (who are also teenage mothers) taught her how to take care of herself and her baby. Her girl friends who are not teenage mothers, started to avoid her because they cannot relate to her experience in pregnancy. On the other hand, boy friends called her *malandi* (slut) and *bobita* (dumb) for not being able to avoid pregnancy.



FIGURE 5  
Unused baby clothes

“This is supposed to be for Andrei (my son)... Jose and I bought it in the market. Last March, I accompanied Jose to collect scrap metals and sell it. The doctor told me that I'm always stressed and tired that is why I got a miscarriage.” [*Kay Andrei dapat ‘yan... binili namin ni Jose sa palengke. Nung March kasi sinasamahan ko si Jose sa tambakan, naglalakad kaming malayo para magkalakal. Ayun, sabi ng doktor, lagi daw kasi akong stressed at pagod kaya nakunan.*]

Upon discovering that she got pregnant, Kristine's parents told her that they (she and Jose) need to stay together and also work to support the needs of their baby. Because of this, the couple decided to work as scavengers. They work from 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM and they earn PhP100.00 to PhP200.00 per day. Even when her stomach was already big (eight months), she still worked the whole day. They managed to save PhP500.00 for the kumadrona (community-based birth attendant) and PhP300.00 for the baby's clothes. Sadly, Kristine had a miscarriage during her last month, just two weeks before the study was conducted.



FIGURE 6  
Selfie

“For me, I’m still a mother even if I had a miscarriage. I did everything to have a safe pregnancy... but I had to work for the baby’s future.” [*Para sa akin, nanay pa rin ako kahit nalaglag ang baby namin. Ginawa ko naman lahat para maging maayos ang pagbubuntis ko kaso kelangan magtrabaho para sa kinabukasan niya.*]

Kristine said that she sometimes blames herself for not being able to look for better livelihood and for not being able to attend checkups for her baby. She also mentioned about how health workers seem to

judge her whenever she tries to ask about her pregnancy and for possible assistance for the child. Because of this, she tends to avoid visiting the community center and just relied on the advice of fellow teenage mothers.

Kristine wants to have her mother checked by a psychiatrist but it is not their family's priority. She also said that still wants to have a child with Jose and this time, she will take care of herself.

### **The story of Monette, age 16**

Monette was not able to graduate from Grade 6 because her elder sister got pregnant and left their family, obliging Monette to take care of their four other siblings. Their house is located right in front of a small dumpsite just inside the community. Every 8:00 PM to 9:00 PM, a truck dumps its cargo and their whole family scavenges through it. They look for recyclable things, sellable metals or plastic bottles, and edible food until 12:00 MN.



FIGURE 7  
Watching drama as pasttime

“Everytime I finish doing household chores, I watch TV. I can see couples... in their houses, when having dates, and sometimes when drunk,

and after weddings... they go on a honeymoon.” [*Tuwing pagkatapos ng gawaing bahay, nanonood ako. Nakikita ko yung mga magjowa sa TV... sa bahay, pag nag-de-date, saka minsan pag lasing, saka pagkatapos ng kasal... honeymoon.*]

Monette decided to run away from home last year to escape financial problems and responsibilities. She said that she just got tired and angry because she has been doing all the work that adults were supposed to do for their child. Monette got pregnant two months after staying at Ruben’s (boyfriend) house. She said that she was not surprised since she knew that it will eventually happen because they are staying together, just like in the shows she watches on TV. After giving birth, she returned to her mother’s house because first, she wants to learn more about taking care of her son and second, she is afraid to ask help from her mother-in-law. Monette thinks that her mother-in-law dislikes her for making Ruben responsible for their child.



FIGURE 8  
Dear Diary

“I like writing in my diary... about what is happening in my life. Like when I met Ruben in a junk shop. I stopped writing after giving birth because I got too busy taking care of my child.” [*Mahilig akong magsulat sa diary... ng mga nangyayari sa buhay ko. Nung nakilala ko si Ruben sa junk shop... Kaso nahinto na ako sa pagsulat nung nanganak na ako. Busy nakasisapag-aalaga.*]

She said that she met Ruben, 18 years old, in a junk shop outside their community and that he courted her for almost three months. Monette’s parents approved of their relationship because Ruben is a regular worker in the junkshop and according to them, he can provide for their future family. When asked about what else is written in her old diary, she said that she also wrote about how some of her girlfriends got disappointed when she got pregnant. She asked for their assistance during her pregnancy, but her friends didn’t know how to help her because none of them have kids.



FIGURE 9  
My sister’s child

“That is the second child of my Ate (elder sister). I look after the kids as she does household work. Now, my sister is the one teaching me

how to take care of my child.” [*Pangalawang anak ‘yan ni ate, tinutulungan ko siyang mag-alaga sa tuwing maraming ginagawa sa bahay. Ngayon, tinuturuan naman niya ako kung paano mga dapat gawin sa anak ko.*]

Monette said that she is not sorry for being a teenage mother. “We will all be mothers in the future, right?” [*Magiging nanay naman tayo lahat, di ba?*] she added. At present, she feels having better relationship with her sister and mother since they are all mothers now. According to her, she is now more mature and understanding regarding their family’s economic situation because she herself budgets the money she gets from her husband. She can also now talk about more topics with her sister from their husbands to their sex lives to their children’s wellbeing.

Monette said that she misses going to malls and that she sometimes gets bored staying home, but she has no other choice.

### The story of Patricia, age 16

Patricia is known in the community as the intelligent girl who ruined her future because of love. She is one of the few girls in their place who was able to reach 4th year high school; but also one of the many girls who got pregnant and was forced to stop studying. Patricia has two younger siblings and her parents are both regular workers in the nearby slaughterhouse.



FIGURE 10  
Women’s underwear



“I took a photo of my underwear because these are the last things to be removed before having sex” [*Bra at panty ang kinunan ko kasi iyan ang mga huling inaalis bago mag-ano... sex.*]

Patricia and her friends never talk about sex in school because they think of it as a disgusting and scary act for boys and girls. Patricia is active in extra-curricular activities, she is part of different academic organizations and an officer in their Citizen Army Training (CAT). She met Paul in one of the school activities that she organized and they became a couple during their JS Prom in 2014. Occasionally, as a form of date, they watch movies or review for exams in Paul’s house. One day, Paul told Patricia that his parents are not around and that they can do something different as a couple. She was surprised when Paul invited her to his bedroom and then according to her, everything just happened. Since then, whenever Paul invite her to dates, it would mean having sex in his house.



FIGURE 11  
Happy Valentine’s Day

“That is Paul’s gift to me last February 14, Valentine’s Day. He’s been living here with us since I got pregnant. At first, his parents disagreed with the set up... but they eventually agreed.” [*Regalo ‘yan sa akin ni Paul noong Feb 14, Valentine’s day. Dito na siya sa amin nakatira simula nang mabuntis ako. Noong una ay ayaw talaga ng magulang niya... pero pumayag rin.*]

Patricia is a graduating high school student when she got pregnant. She is from the star section and she was supposed to graduate as an outstanding student leader. However, because of her pregnancy, the school administrator did not allow her to finish her studies even through the home school program. On the other hand, Paul was allowed to continue his studies. During the time of group discussion, Paul was actually in class.



FIGURE 12  
My son

“This is my son. At first, we tried to hide the pregnancy. I planned to abort him because I was still studying that time.” [*Anak ko ito. Nung una, itatago pa sana namin. Plano ko ipalaglag kasi nag-aaral pa ako nun.*]

Due to severe frustration from not being able to continue her studies, she decided to ask for help from friends who have abortion experiences. A friend gave her the contact number of a hilot, one who conducts abortion in their community for PhP300.00. Paul and her mother, upon discovering the plan, stopped her. Patricia’s mother said that they should just see her pregnancy as a blessing and not as a burden to their family, while Paul said that he will be a responsible father and husband to their future family. Because of this, she did not pursue her abortion plan. Patricia

shared that despite the hardships of being a teenage mother, she can feel how the mothers (teenager and older ones) in their neighborhood care of her. Even if they cannot provide financially, her neighbors give her emotional support in times of difficulty and also serve as guides in taking care of her one-year old child. She also said that she is looking forward to being a good mother to her child just like the older mothers in their neighborhood.

Patricia plans to finish high school by 2017. She wants to take a technical education training course in baking or in commercial cooking and apply in nearby hotels or restaurants.

### **The story of Loraine, age 17**

Loraine is an only child. Her mother is a housewife while her father works abroad. She went into a private school from elementary to college. Unlike the other teenage mothers in the study, Loraine does not have to work for her daily needs.



FIGURE 13  
CP as source of knowledge

“Ron made me watch videos in his cellphone... pornography and sex scandals. We often watch in their house because his parents are not

around.” [*Pinapanood ako ni Ron ng videos sa cellphone niya... ano, mga porno sa ka mga scandals. Dun kami sa kanila nanonood kasi laging wala mga magulang niya.*]

Lorraine was a first-year college student when she got pregnant by her boyfriend of three years. According to her, they have been sexually active since 4th year high school, and they only rely on withdrawal method because her boyfriend is not comfortable in using condoms. Lorraine is not familiar with other contraceptive methods and she is afraid to explore them. However, her mother is encouraging her to get a ligation after she gives birth. Her boyfriend is currently finishing college while his parents are supporting the needs of their child.



FIGURE 14  
His shirt

“Ron was here last week. He left that shirt... he’s often not here because he is still finishing his studies (college). His parents do not allow him to stay here for a long time.” [*Noong isang linggo ay andito si Ron. Naiwan niya yang t-shirt... Hindi siya madalas dito sa amin kasi nag-aaral pa siya (college). Di siya pinapayagan ng mga magulang niya na magtagal dito sa amin.*]

Loraine sees Ron as a responsible father because he visits them even during exam week. He saves his allowance to buy fruits and other healthy food for Loraine and their future child. Both of them are excited to be parents and they look forward to having their own place someday. Loraine mentioned that she hopes to stay with Ron's family in Quezon City after his graduation because she doesn't want their child to grow up near a dump site. She was worried that the baby might get sickly and unhealthy.



FIGURE 15  
I'm a mother

“Every time that my mom is not around, our neighbors look after me. They always remind me to eat and rest. More people are talking to me now as I am soon to become a mother.” [*Sa tuwing wala si mama dito (sa bahay), mga kapitbahay ang nagbantay sa akin. Lagi akong pinapaalalahanan na kumain at magpahinga. Parang ano, mas marami nang kumakausap sa akin ngayon na magiging nanay na ako.*]

Loraine was nine months pregnant during the time of the study. She mentioned that she felt more included in their community when she became pregnant because more people are asking about her condition and her needs. She also pointed out that she is starting to meet new friends

(who are also teenage mothers) whenever she gets out of their house because her pregnancy serves as a conversation starter and they feel more comfortable in openly talking about their situation.

Loraine wanted to finish her college degree someday. Her parents told her that they will take care of her child and save money for her to be able to go back to school.

### **BEYOND THE BLAMING: WHAT HAPPENS BEFORE AND AFTER?**

Upon knowing the stories of the participants, an analysis was made to identify issues concerning teenage mothers. Five themes were mined from the group discussions. These include the following:

#### **Young men's influence in young women's sexuality.**

Only two out of the five participants were able to reach high school. Of this, one was able to reach college but eventually dropped out because of pregnancy. Most of them learned about sex from their boyfriends - by watching videos and by engaging in sex. One mentioned that she learned it first from girlfriends who have experiences, which they also learned from their partners. It is important to point out how young men influence young women's sexuality in this context. Teaching their partners about sex shows how young men tend to have monopoly in sexual knowledge - that the sources are not reliable too - which leads them to be in control of their partners' sexuality. Because of the unknown consequences on the part of the young women, despite hesitations and feeling of nervousness, they tend to agree and follow their partner's decision in having sex.

#### **Unknown state responsibility.**

Participants blame themselves for getting kicked out of school (due to pregnancy), for not using contraceptives, and for not having stable livelihoods. These stories reflect how the state programs and policies, which are supposed to protect and help young women, is not actually reaching the grassroots level. The particular case of Patricia shows how despite laws stating that

pregnant students should not be forced to leave school (Magna Carta of Women, Section 13c states that “no school shall turn out or refuse admission to a female student solely on account of her being pregnant outside of marriage during her term in school”), administrators easily get their way because the teenage mothers are not aware of their rights. It was also mentioned in the discussion how teenage mothers simply choose not to seek help because health providers are not attending to their needs properly. These kinds of behaviors push teenage mothers away and make them vulnerable to unsafe medical practices advised by community members.

### **Acceptance by the older members of the community.**

The teenage mothers from Tondo, Manila find themselves more connected with older women in the community because they can talk with them about their experiences and thoughts on their husbands and children. It was also mentioned how the neighborhood attend to their emotional needs. This can also be attributed to the fact that topics such as pregnancy, sexuality, and motherhood are not often discussed with young women in the community. Hence, when they become pregnant, it is the only time that older mothers start discussing the topics with them. While it can be seen as a late response, the teenage mothers appreciate it as it gives them a sense of acceptance.

### **Connectedness among themselves and rejection from the “more careful” youth.**

Solidarity is built among teenage mothers as they get to meet new friends who are also in the same situation. They share stories and experiences with them (even their sex lives) while doing chores in the communal washing area or in the market place. Teenage mothers, at a very young age, see themselves as more mature because of their pregnancy and because how they now are now managing the budget of their family. While acceptance and solidarity are present, rejection from the “more careful” youth is also evident. This rejection is being experienced particularly from the youth who are not teenage parents. They tend to judge teenage mothers (but not the teenage father) for being careless and not using contraceptives.

### **Multiple burden of a poor teenage mother.**

Both teenage parents experience hardship because of early parenthood. They have to work to provide for the needs of their child (clothes, food, checkup, etc.) while fulfilling filial duties as sons and daughters (helping in household chores, looking after younger siblings, etc.). Despite this, there is a big difference between the experiences of a teenage mother and a teenage father. Based on the sharing made by the participants, the effects of teenage pregnancy include but are not limited to the following: dropping out of school (while their boyfriend continues to study), having limited time for self-recreation with friends, being blamed for lack of knowledge on sexuality and pregnancy, and depending on their husbands for livelihood. At the end, when the budget for the family is not enough, the teenage mother takes it upon herself to look for help and other ways to get by. It is also important to point out that while teenage mothers are being scrutinized for their carelessness, the teenage fathers are praised for being responsible with regard to their wife and children.

## **CONCLUSION**

As the Philippines becomes a counter-trend in the global issue of teenage pregnancy, it is imperative to identify how the young mothers accept and understand their situation. Based on the discussions, adolescent sexuality is learned by young women not in school but through their partners, who, most probably learned it from other resources (e.g., pornography, friends). These limited and unscientific sources are the only options that young women have because of the conservative practices in their community. One example is that the parents of young women tend to avoid talking with their child about sex, family planning, and pregnancy until they become pregnant too and they have no choice but to discuss it. This creates a culture of silence among young women and it leads to having no credible source of knowledge at all.

Romantic relationships, at least in Tondo, can start as early as 11 years old. The youth who do not attend school, are busy doing chores,



taking care of their siblings, and helping their parents find source of money. During their free time, they hang out with their friends and neighbors. Being put in such condition, adolescents tend to see having romantic relationships as the next step in their lives because there are no other options. In all the studied cases, parents are supportive of their child who wants to be involved in a romantic relationship. The problem lies however in the lack of further explanation for the young couple. The assumption is that they are ready to have a partner and that they are old enough to know their limitations. They may have responsibilities at home like an adult but in reality, they are still young girls and boys who are in dire need of guidance.

Upon discovering their child's pregnancy, parents of young women tend to accept motherhood as their child's destiny. Of all the participants, only one was encouraged by her parents to go back to school after giving birth. Teenage mothers experience a more welcoming and involved environment as they proceed with their pregnancy. They see this as sort of approval from the elder women and that they can already be included in more mature conversations. However, behind this atmosphere is the normalization of domestication of teenage mothers and the acceptance on the traditional role of women - taking care of the child, waiting for the husband, staying in the community, looking after financial needs of the family, among others.

The views of the teenage mothers in adolescent sexuality, romantic relationships, and motherhood in Tondo are highly influenced by their economic condition. Extreme poverty is the main reason that they dropped out of school, and they were forced to work like adults. Because of their adult-like workloads, they tend to think that the next stage is having a partner and thus building a family. While the community members themselves also take actions to help the teenage mothers in their transition to adulthood, the role of broader structures in the formation of the youth's mind set on sexuality and family planning cannot be ignored. Until the state realizes and acts upon this, we will all be hoping for the day that teenage pregnancy in the Philippines reach what Anthony Downs refer to as the "post-problem stage."

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