

Social Subsistence: The Case of Student Parents

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Abstract. This qualitative research, which employed phenomenological approach, investigated the social lives of two (2) teen parents, Mario and Lanie, who were enrolled in the Senior High School program in a public secondary school in the Schools Division of Nueva Vizcaya. It analyzed the social practices and academic behaviors of Mario (Case 1) and Lanie (Case 2). The themed information collected from the subjects themselves, as well as the data gathered from the identified reliable informants, revealed that both cases are financially struggling for their education while striving hard to meet their familial responsibilities and obligations. The two student parents also experience difficulty in managing their time for their academic and family work. In addition, Mario and Lanie are also socially less active because of the demands of care and attention for their child, and life partner, too. As such, the two young, teen parents need scholarships and other humanitarian programs for them to be able to pursue and finish their education while showing up for their family obligations. Moreover, the teen parents, based on the narratives of the informants and the subjects as well, need support groups which are genuinely willing to help them pursue their education and ease the academic challenges they are confronted with. It is therefore imperative for school managers and administrators, together with the teachers and parents, and the school community in general, to strengthen school partnership initiatives, to maintain scholarship, financial, and guidance programs for needy students, and to enforce youth activities such as sports competitions, leadership training, children and adolescent health and wellness programs, and others, to alleviate such social challenges among teenagers, especially young parents.

Introduction

Teenage pregnancy is a global issue that affects a large part of the society. Despite the advancements in sexual health and contraception, it remains a major problem in most countries. This problem is felt not only by the parents but also in the schools where these students are sent for it will affect the individuality of the learner (Callahan & Dominilli, Rutman, Strega, 2002). Also, the problem of having young parents at school is not new to anyone. Although many young couples who become parents before finishing their education value academic qualifications, they may be unable to cope and excel academically if the help they need to finish their studies is unavailable or inadequate. Instead of receiving support, teen parents' students are often subjected to confusion and pressure from different perspectives. However, not all young parents experience the same difficulties in attending school. In school, teen parents face unique challenges in ensuring that their new parenthood responsibilities and identities do not lead to giving up formal education.

The proponents have been associating the problem of teen parents with the findings of Moonga (2014) wherein teen mothers faced a lot of challenges in their pursuit of completing school. Teen mothers explained their challenges ranging from the school environment (such as stigmatization and discrimination, being tainted, less concentration, poor time management, role conflicts and irregular attendance to school because of baby needs, lack of counseling and bullying in school), economic challenges (poverty and finances, lack of support) and personal related challenges (role conflicts, low self-esteem, rejection from the family, and community). The findings of this study on teenage mothers seemed to have

contributed to teenage parents' high dropout rate, as they were unable to satisfy the demands of their situation or the dilemma, they found themselves in.

Within the Senior High School department of Lamo National High School, this study focuses on two grade 12 students (one from the TVL tract and one from an Academic tract) who are currently experiencing parenthood. These cases are examined in the context of similar situations observed in the previous school year.

With much desire to promote students from one grade level to another, the teachers and school administrators are reaching out to them. And since this school is an advocate of the Zero Dropout Rate, Education for All Goals of 2015, and Child-Friendly School programs of the Department of Education (DepEd), the research proponents would like to investigate the undisclosed challenges of teen parents in the process of trying to finish their schooling to prevent future dropouts. This is also in a way, the researchers and other teachers, may employ special intervention for them. Through this study, and upon dissemination of results, the school may initiate feasible intervention to reduce, if not totally eradicate, such situation and its ill-effects. As what Harold Kushner said, "When you are kind to others, it not only changes you; it changes the world" (Goyal, 2020).

Moreover, this study intended to initiate school-based advocacy against teenage pregnancy, utilizing these students as advocates. As posited by Wyckoff (2021) in an AAP Clinical Report, these teen parents (ages 15 to 19 years), have unique challenges. They are also at high risk for repeat births at a young age. Banking on the statement that by creating a supportive, educational environment for them, "pediatricians can positively influence the long-term health and lifelong trajectories for adolescent parents and their children," trying to reach out still to these students in a different manner, lifting, upon permission, the procedure employed by Binay-an (2019) in the research she conducted, this study was carried out.

This study aimed to discover the social and academic subsistence of teen parents who are enrolled as Senior High School students at a national high school in a particular school year.

Particularly, it lodged on the observation and information gathering about their social and academic practices and behaviors as bases for the formulation of socio-oriented recommendations for student-teen parents.

The questions which were asked are the following:

1. How do the teen parents get along with family members, friends and acquaintances, teachers, and with strangers?
2. What other social practices and behavioral observations may be associated with the teen parents' performance in school?

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative-descriptive research design in the form of a phenomenological approach leading towards a sociographic method of investigation using qualitative analysis, interpretation, and thematic presentation. It focused on analyzing the social practices and academic behaviors of teen parent students of Lamo National High School through observations, interviews, narratives, field notes, and immersion findings, all patterned from Binay-an (2019). Interview questions were open-ended; data collected are qualitative; and analysis included an attempt to identify themes or to come up with generalizations regarding how the responses were perceived or experienced.

Since purposive sampling techniques were employed, two identified teen parents enrolled in the Senior High School for the school year were considered as the research participants. These students are living with partners from the opposite sex, one with children, and the other, pregnant, of whom were considered potential research participants. Also, their respective family members, friends, and acquaintances, teachers, other individuals connected to them were considered as informants. Profiles of the participants were taken from the students themselves, from retrieved school reports, and from the informants.

Results and Discussion

Problem 1: How do the teen parents get along with family members, friends and acquaintances, teachers, and with strangers?

Case No. 1 (CN-001-MARIO)

According to Mario, in getting along with family members, friends and acquaintances, teachers, and with strangers, he sets boundaries; treats and deals with them well with the set boundaries; and by being kind and true to himself. Meanwhile, Mario's family members and relatives said that he always makes bonds, doing silly things, shows being supportive, and is always there to correct wrongdoings in a subtle manner. In school, according to his friends, schoolmates, and teachers, Mario communicates and connects as a student, not as a parent. He is caring and concerned, and always there ready to lean on for he is kind and always shows his real personality. In fact, one informant stated that Mario acts like a role model.

Case No. 2 (CN-002-LANIE)

Lanie claims that she is kind. She believes that she treats people well. She added that she respects them regardless of who they are which was certainly approvingly affirmed by her family and relatives. Moreover, her friends, schoolmates, and teachers described her as very passionate and independent and interact as a learner, all of which was affirmed by one of her acquaintances that she (Lanie) is really nice to be with.

Problem 2. What other social practices and behavioral observations may be associated with the teen parents' performance in school?

Case No. 1 (CN-001-MARIO)

Mario describes himself as hardworking and responsible. His family and relatives also asserted that the former is determined, responsible, and optimistic in pursuing his dreams which was corroborated by his schoolmates, friends, and teachers saying that Mario is responsible and a tough man. According also to one of his acquaintances, Mario is manifesting behaviors like that of a normal human being – not perfect at all but strong, industrious, and dedicated to his studies. Moreover, Mario stated that he is academically active and he spends time wisely which was confirmed by his family and relatives. Accordingly, he has been studying well and spending his time wisely, and he is independent and self-directed (contained). His schoolmates and teachers highlighted Mario for being a strong and dedicated person, a yearning individual, and a good father. His other acquaintances noticed that Mario is committed to his goals.

Case No. 2 (CN-002-LANIE)

Lanie admitted that she is coping hard with many things. She is described by her family as a good and responsible fellow. Meanwhile, those who were interviewed in school said that Lanie has a strong personality and is dedicated to what she has been doing; and according to other informants, she is known to be good at managing her time and committed to pursuing her studies. In addition, she is claimed to be good at managing time, responsible, focused, passionate, and commendable.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The significant findings of the study resulted in the drawing of the following conclusions:

1. Teen parents get along well with their social environments. They act normally as teenagers towards others; however, there is a little drawback since they need to spare some amount of attention, time, and focus for their child and partners of which there are things non-teen parents cannot do and/or they are restricted to do because of early family obligations. They tend to be more cautious about their actions towards others but create a lot more time for getting well with family members this time. These student parents need more and closer guidance and support. Hence, schools, particularly class advisers and guidance counselors, should thoroughly strengthen partnerships with stakeholders, community, and support institutions to establish programs like scholarships, financial assistance projects, and other initiatives that aim to reduce student parents' burdens in pursuing their education while attending to their children and their partners.

2. Teen parents normally manifest social behavioral patterns, activities, and practices as teenagers: happy-go-lucky life, carefree, and outgoing; however, with their situation as parents and/or spouse to their child and/or partners, respectively, they tend to manifest one-step maturity level because they have added obligations and responsibilities, like: to babysit at home, to watch over and provide health care to the child, hunt for a living, earn for school allowance, and go along with in-laws and other members of the extended family, as most of them live with their parents at the latter's abodes, all of which generally, unfavorably affecting the teen parents' school performance. As such, the school guidance services and student government organizations must strengthen their programs to prevent and reduce circumstances resulting to and from early marriage and teen pregnancies such as revitalizing the Adolescent Reproductive Health (ARH), Homeroom Guidance, and Youth Formation programs.

3. Financial struggle is what critically challenges the education of teen parents as they do not only bother for money allowances for themselves to use in school but also for the daily living of the "young" family they created. Moreover, difficulty in time management is also affected as they need to attend to many things now, which definitely results in less prioritized schooling. Next to financial and time constraints is a lack of mental capacity to handle two or three equally crucial matters like education, family, and social being at one time, which makes it difficult for teen parents to pay attention to tough and challenging school requirements, simultaneously attending to sick child, and earning money for living. Indeed, School Partnership Focal Persons should include scouting for sponsors, donors, and benefactors not only for infra-projects and other tangible ventures but also those that would alleviate academic and social struggles of the vulnerable group in schools.

4. With scholarships and financial support programs, schools could alleviate student parents' money problems to support their schooling so that their meager resources would be spent only for their new family. Other possible supports young parents could get from their academic world include: allowing modular and/or blended learning to favor them most; subjecting them to special and regular guidance and counseling program; offering them remedial and remediation services; giving special consideration to them in terms of submission of requirements; and closely attending to and/or providing them their backup and support needs amid their current situation as young parents struggling for their education and their newly-built family. With all these, a special curriculum may be designed for teen parents such as blending the instruction modalities, allowing adjustments with requirements and projects, and extending remedial programs for struggling students.

5. Other socio-academic oriented initiatives that could be initiated in support to the education of teen parents may include a partnership with the student parents' family and other support agencies; socials activities; and a review of the curriculum to favor or cater to them, all because these young parents are also victims of their actions and circumstances, and strong social influences. As such, they themselves need solid "child care" being one of the most vulnerable social groups. As regards these, if there is no way of including them in the curriculum, Good Manners and Right Conduct (GMRC), advising, counseling, and conferences should at least be integrated into the delivery of the learning competencies across learning areas, added with close monitoring of implementation by the administrators. School sports and other social activities must also be reinforced to win closer and bring away young people from juvenile acts including sexual activities out of marriage. Finally, parents should uphold strong connections to teachers for both to be more watchful about the children's activities in school, at home, and in the community.

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Competing Interests Statement

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Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study; all data used were obtained from previously published sources as cited in the reference list.

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Appendices

No appendices are attached to this study.