

Support Teenage Mothers Not Teenage Pregnancy: A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Pregnant Students in Public Secondary Schools in Guiuan

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Article Details:

Received: 21 May 2026

Revised: 28 May 2026

Accepted: 5 June 2026

Published: 12 June 2026

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Recommended Citation:

Tanseco, V. C., Acosta, G. D. C., Macasusi, C. D. A., Oquina, F. L., Cordero, R. B. (2026). Support Teenage Mothers Not Teenage Pregnancy: A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Pregnant Students in Public Secondary Schools in Guiuan. *The International Review of Multidisciplinary Research*. 1 (8), 111-117.
<https://doi.org/10.67167/vertex.576>

Index Terms:

teenage pregnancy, student-mothers, education, public secondary schools, support

Abstract. This study focuses on teenage pregnancy, a continuous social problem that greatly hinders the academic performance and progress of young people. This phenomenon is especially common in low-income societies where knowledge about reproductive health and related support are inadequate. This study aimed to examine the lived experiences of pregnant teenagers in terms of their academic experiences before, during, and after pregnancy, including the obstacles they faced, the strategies they used, and the mechanisms that allowed them to continue studying at public secondary schools in Guiuan, Eastern Samar. The qualitative approach of narrative Inquiry was applied to this study. Three informants between 16 and 17 years old, who got pregnant while attending public secondary schools, were carefully chosen as informants for this project. Data collection took place through in-person semi-structured interviews to allow in-depth descriptions of their experiences. Creswell and Poth's Data Analysis Spiral served as an analysis framework. The findings of the study shows that teenage pregnancies have significant impacts on the respondents socially, emotionally, and academically. Challenges faced included being shunned by other people, financial troubles, tiredness, and increased duties related to caring for the child during pregnancy. Although these were challenging moments for the teens, they helped increase their resilience and motivation. They largely depended on the help of people around them such as family members, friends, teachers, and, to some degree, government agencies in order to stay in school despite the hardships. Therefore, there is need to ensure that the necessary structures are put in place for them to complete their studies.

Introduction

Teenage pregnancy is a critical societal and educational problem that has great implications for young women in terms of their schooling. Annually, about 21 million teenage girls aged between 15-19 years become pregnant, out of which 12 million bear their children (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023). In many cases, these pregnancies are unplanned, owing to a lack of access to contraceptive measures and sex education among teenagers. Most teenage pregnancies occur in low-and middle-income nations, especially sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America, due to inadequate access to reproductive healthcare services (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2022).

One of the negative effects of teenage pregnancies includes educational interruption, since most pregnant teenagers are forced out of education because of stigma or even lack of support from institutions. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Global Education Monitoring Report (2023), teenage pregnancy continues to be a major reason for girls leaving schools in Africa, South Asia, and Latin America.

In the case of the Philippines, there has been a survey conducted all over the country in November 2020 by the Commission on Population and Development (POPCOM), indicating the prevalence of adolescent pregnancies among Filipino adults regardless of their location and socio-economic background. It is clear from this example that this problem is rather widespread and deeply rooted in society. Moreover, it appears to be an issue recognized by almost all members of society for its negative impacts on both the teenagers themselves and their families and communities.

In Guiuan, Eastern Samar, teenage pregnancy continues to be a significant concern, as supported by multiple local and national sources. According to a report by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), five teenagers become pregnant each day in Eastern Samar, based on data collected from local health facilities between 2011 and 2012 (UNFPA Philippines, 2013). This alarming trend emphasize the ongoing reproductive health challenges faced by adolescents in the region. Moreover, a recent study published in the Philippine Journal of Health Research and Development emphasized the adolescent pregnancy remains a pressing public health issue in Eastern Visayas, particularly among teenagers from low-income families and minimal educational attainment (Dela Luna et al., 2025).

While previous studies have examined pregnant students' lived experiences in a variety of settings (Kotoh et al., 2022; Galabo & Gempes, 2017), presenting significant findings into their more general circumstances and realities. However, there remains a gap in understanding the challenges experienced by pregnant students attending public secondary schools in Guiuan. While these studies provide valuable insights into the general experiences of pregnant students, they do not specifically address the intersection of schooling and pregnancy in this particular demographic. Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by conducting a deeper exploration of the lived experiences of pregnant students in Public Secondary Schools in Guiuan.

The emphasis will be on understanding and exploring their personal stories in their educational journeys—during, before, and after their childbirth—as well as the difficulties they face in balancing their schoolwork and the responsibilities of pregnancy, and the coping mechanisms they use to navigate these two elements of their lives.

In addition, it is expected that this study would also add valuable knowledge in the social science field by illuminating the fact that the educational system and policies contribute to either maintain or alleviate such inequalities in society, especially among the more susceptible members of society. The importance of social reforms and changes in the educational institutions is highlighted as a way to create a conducive environment for all learners, particularly the pregnant girls. From this point of view, it aligns with the Social Science goal of addressing social problems.

Methodology

Research Design

The focus of this study is to document and interpret the personal stories of pregnant students enrolled in public secondary high schools in Guiuan, capturing their experiences before, during, and after pregnancy to understand how they make sense of their educational journey. Therefore, a qualitative research design--- specifically narrative inquiry approach was chosen to clearly present the description of the subject of inquiry. Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research approach that focuses on gathering and interpreting people's personal stories in order to acquire insight into their lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Research Locale

This study was conducted in Guiuan, Eastern Samar, specifically, in selected mainland public secondary schools in Guiuan National High School (GNHS), Taytay Integrated School (TIS), and Sulangan National High School (SNHS) that have pregnant students.

Respondents of the Study

The information collected using the purposive sampling method for selecting the informants formed the basis of this narrative analysis. Purposive sampling, a type of non-probability sampling, enabled the researchers to purposefully select the subjects in the study depending on their specific characteristics. The subjects were chosen according to the objectives of the study and their individual characteristics (Palinkas, 2015). The informants included pregnant students or students who have at one time or another been pregnant while in public secondary schools in Guiuan, Grades 7-12.

Inclusion Criteria

1. Students in pregnancy status, currently enrolled in grade 7-12

2. Students in pregnancy status, currently enrolled in public secondary schools of Guiuan

Exclusion Criteria

1. Students currently enrolled in grade 7-12
2. Students in pregnancy status, currently enrolled in private secondary schools of Guiuan

Research Instrument

In this study, the researcher conducted face-to-face interactions with the respondents and carried out in-depth interviews. According to Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2019), in-depth interviews were an effective qualitative tool for researchers to explore deeply into participants' personal experiences, meanings, and perspectives. Greg Guest et al. (2013) stated that "there is good reason for the pervasiveness of this method for it is versatile across a range of study topics, adaptable to challenging field conditions, and excellent for not just providing information but for generating understanding as well."

For this study, the researcher utilized a semi-structured interview guide that focused on the participants' feelings, perceptions, and meanings related to their pregnancy and schooling.

Data Gathering Procedure

The data collection for this study consisted of open-ended questions and face-to-face interactions with the informants through in-depth interviews. This was designed to further explore and develop an understanding of the lived experiences of pregnant teenage students.

The researchers used purposive sampling in order to identify the informants of the study. The selection of the informants was based on characteristics that fit the set criteria and fulfilled the requirements of this study.

Afterward, the key informants were asked if they were willing to participate in the study and be interviewed on a date and time set by the researchers. The researchers employed a semi-structured interview which involved open-ended questions based on the topic the researchers wanted to cover. Open-ended questions "allow the respondents to take whatever direction and use whatever words they want in order to express what they have to say" Michael Quinn Patton (2015). John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth (2018) also emphasized the importance of such questions in phenomenological research, as they elicited detailed lived experiences from participants without being constrained by predefined options. Lastly, each interview with the informants was recorded using a smartphone. These data were recorded to be coded and analyzed.

Data Analysis

Creswell & Poth's (2018) Data Analysis Spiral was used as the dominant theoretical lens for analyzing the narratives of teenage mothers. The process is cyclical and consists of the data interaction phases of organizing, reading, describing, interpreting, and representing. The repeated cycle of the process guarantees a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of informants and meaning they derive from those experiences.

Reflexivity Statement

In order to reduce researcher bias in interpreting the data and organizing the shared experiences of the informants, the researchers put aside any personal convictions concerning the topic before conducting the study. This was achieved by recognizing any biases and preconceived notions about the topic before conducting the study and putting them aside. The use of epoche or bracketing was used by the researchers in order to put aside personal beliefs. The researchers maintained objectivity in their responses to the key informants by establishing rapport and conducting a detailed analysis of their statements throughout the study.

Enhancement of Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, the researchers reported the key informants' statements objectively. Rest assured that all information was treated with strict confidentiality and was used solely for educational purposes. Thus, no one used the collected data without the consent of both the participants and the researchers.

Ethical Consideration

After the purposive selection of participants, the researcher sent a communication letter to the selected students who were currently or had experienced pregnancy while enrolled in public secondary schools. Recognizing that the informants were minors, the researchers also sought informed parental or guardian consent prior to any data collection. A parental consent form was issued, outlining the purpose of the study, the nature of the interview process, and the voluntary nature of participation. Only students whose parents or guardians had granted written permission were invited to participate. The collected data were treated with strict confidentiality. Only the adviser and the researchers had access to the data, and once the study was completed, all accumulated data were securely destroyed.

Results and Discussion

This study explored the lived experiences of teenage mothers enrolled in public secondary schools in Guiuan, Eastern Samar. Three key informants aged 16-17 years old who shared their personal journeys, providing insights into their lives before, during and after pregnancy. Teenage pregnancy disrupts the emotional, physical, social and academic life of a student, but this also foster students resilience and personal growth. In this study, we have explored that teenage mother change their lives as a student and as a mother as well, on how they handle the responsibilities of motherhood while continuing their education.

The research was guided by the domain of inquiry, that served as the basis for data collection, data analysis and explication of the findings.

1. What are the experiences of pregnant teenage students before, during, and after becoming pregnant while attending public secondary schools in Guiuan?
2. What are the challenges and coping mechanisms of pregnant teenage students in public secondary schools in Guiuan as they navigate both pregnancy and schooling?
3. How do pregnant teenage students in public secondary schools in Guiuan make sense of their experiences before, during, and after pregnancy in relation to their education and personal growth?
4. How do they perceive and make meaning of the support provided by their families, teachers, school administrators, peers, and government agencies throughout their pregnancy and educational journey?
5. How does teenage pregnancy affect their identity, future goals, and decision-making processes?

The informants' responses were organized into nine (9) key themes: experiences prior pregnancy, relationships and social support prior to pregnancy, emotional responses to pregnancy discovery, life as a student pregnant mother, supportive networks during pregnancy, being both a student and mother, lessons learnt about education, decision-making, and emotional maturity, message to peers who may be pregnant, and recommendations for support systems and policies.

1. Experiences prior pregnancy

It is an analysis of the lives of teenage mothers prior to their pregnancies. This involves examining the routines, dreams, and relationships of teenage mothers. There are two main subthemes here. First, the lives of informants, before becoming pregnant, were different and while some enjoyed free-spirited activities, some had difficult experiences but were still determined to continue with their education. This helped improve their resilience and determination. Secondly, teenage mothers wanted to accomplish their dreams and be professionals in the medical field and criminology among others due to the influence of personal experience and family responsibilities.

Education was a tool through which they intended to realize their dreams and benefit their families.

2. Relationships and Social support before pregnancy

The sub-theme analyzes the lives of teenage mothers before their pregnancies as it relates to relationships with their families, classmates, teachers, communities, and other members of society. It also examines how relationships and social interaction affected their emotions. Informants described their experiences in terms of support; there are those, for instance, who got nurturing environments, but there are also those who experienced rejection from their families, insincere friends among others, hence making them isolated emotionally.

3. Emotional Responses to Pregnancy Discovery

It seeks to explore the emotions teenagers face when pregnant and how their feelings develop from being fearful to accepting their situation. The first sub-theme, 3.1, explores fear and anxiety that are common amongst pregnant teens

because of the shock and dilemma they face. In the process, their lives as teenagers get disrupted and there is fear and uncertainties regarding the responsibilities that come with motherhood. In contrast, the second sub-theme focuses on how these women become gradually more accepting of their pregnancies due to faith and personal reflections.

4. Life as a Student Pregnant Mother

This theme is focused on the experiences that pregnant teens encounter as they seek to balance their studies and pregnancy. It highlights challenges faced by these students that affect their studies as it includes physical and cognitive problems that interfere with their school attendance and performance. Social challenges are associated with the obvious signs of pregnancy that lead to isolation of the students. However, social responses from fellow classmates have played a major role in making pregnant teens feel better.

5. Supportive Networks during Pregnancy

This is a study of various kinds of supportive network that teenage mothers enjoyed during their pregnancy and their attendance in school, which describes how the kinds of supportive network were instrumental in affecting them positively. These supports included personal supportive network such as the family members, friends, and the teacher, and also institutional supportive networks. The former provided them with care and guidance, emotional support from the latter, and support in terms of conducive learning environment from the former. Community programs and 4Ps program were also sources of financial and medical supports respectively. Overall, these were very important as far as helping teenage mothers handle their situation was concerned.

6. Being Both a Student and Mother

This section will deal with how being teenage mothers affected the participants and especially how the change in their priorities and role identities affected them. Prior to that, they valued their freedom and social lives; however, after the onset of their pregnancies, their priorities shifted from themselves to their children, hence neglecting their social interactions with others. Nevertheless, this change helped them grow personally and become responsible and emotionally mature women.

7. Lessons Learnt About Education, Decision-Making, and Emotional Maturity

This section focuses on the lessons learnt about the importance of education, decision-making, and emotional maturity because of the experiences encountered while coping with being a teenage mother. The lessons learnt about education include that completing the education is important in securing a stable future in life. Also, the importance of planning is evident since the participants had to deal with many difficulties during the early stages of motherhood. Besides that, the participants have become aware of themselves, including self-reflection on the decisions made and their impacts.

8. Message to Peers Who May be Pregnant

This message includes information that the teenage mothers would like to convey to teenagers facing similar circumstances. This advice entails the importance of making well-thought decisions to avoid regrets in the future as far as education and life choices are concerned. The message includes making efforts to avoid bad company that may affect future plans negatively. For teenagers dealing with teenage pregnancy, the message includes perseverance and being receptive to all forms of help offered and seeing the baby as motivation to achieve dreams.

9. Recommendations for Support Systems and Policies

This underscores the point that dealing with teenage pregnancies needs both individual toughness and institutional support through educational institutions, communities, and governmental agencies. The participants emphasized the need for understanding school systems and policies that play an important part in aiding young mothers in managing their struggles. Important findings include the critical position played by the teacher community in offering an environment that is free of judgment and is empathic enough for student-mothers to build their self-confidence. Moreover, the participants recommended government interventions that provide opportunities in reproductive health knowledge, medical services, vocational assistance, and educational support to teenage parents so that they do not remain marginalized in society.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study conclude that teenage pregnancy, while highly disruptive to the academic and personal lives of adolescents, also becomes a turning point for growth and maturity when accompanied by sufficient support systems. Teenage mothers in this study demonstrated resilience in balancing the dual roles of student and parent, yet their challenges highlight the pressing need for more inclusive and empathetic environments within families, schools, and communities. It is evident that education remains central to their aspirations, and that despite physical, emotional, and social struggles, they maintain a strong desire to finish their studies and secure better futures for their children. The study also reveals that gaps in reproductive health services, livelihood opportunities, and schoolbased interventions continue to hinder the progress of teenage mothers, underscoring the importance of coordinated efforts across institutions. Ultimately, teenage pregnancy is not only an individual struggle but also a social issue that requires collective responsibility to prevent early pregnancies while supporting those already in the situation.

Acknowledgement

Here, the researchers want to extend their deep appreciation to all those people who helped the researchers conduct this study.

Firstly, sincere thanks is given to God Almighty for giving them wisdom, strength, guidance, and knowledge. They give thanks to God for the guidance He gave them, which helped them in overcoming several difficulties, as well as the determination given to them to conduct this study.

A special note of thanks is given to the subject teacher Prof. Mark Van P. Macawile for the valuable guidance provided to them in conducting this study.

Thanks is also extended to Mr. Alvin A. Daga, the research adviser, for his valuable advice, intellectual suggestions, and helpful in the conduct of this study.

Recognition is extended to the panel members, Dr. Eddie C. Manzano, Dr. Manuela P. Sison, and Dr. Alvin B. Lacaba, for their meaningful comments and suggestions that guided the researchers towards better results.

Appreciation is also given to Dr. Joel C. Del Valle, school principal of Guiuan National High School, Dr. Marlon Q. Sayde, school principal of Taytay Integrated School and Mrs. Nora Odita former principal of Sulangan National High School, for the guidance and permitting the researchers conduct their research and interview students enrolled in their respective schools.

Special thanks also to Dr. Gorgonio G. Diaz Jr, Schools Division Superintendent, Division of Eastern Samar for letting the researchers conduct the study from Guiuan National High School, Taytay Integrated School, and Sulangan National High School.

The researchers acknowledge their beloved family for the enduring financial support, love, faith, parental guidance, and constant presence, which were essential elements in conducting this research.

Finally, the researchers extend their heartfelt thanks to all the informants, as well as their guardians, whose participation greatly contributed to the completion of the study.

Funding

This research received no external funding from any public, commercial, or not-for-profit funding agency, and no organization provided financial support for the conduct of the study, authorship, or publication of this article.

Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

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.