

## Sexual engagement: the lived experiences of early adulthood involved in premarital sex

Engajamento sexual: as experiências vividas no início da idade adulta envolvidas em sexo antes do casamento

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### ABSTRACT

Sexual engagement and activities among adolescents have been reported to be increasing worldwide. The prevalence of premarital sex and pregnancy continues to increase and has become very common in the country. This study aims to determine the reasons why early adults engage in premarital sex to understand and determine their experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights. We employed a descriptive phenomenological research design. Four early adults or two couples participated in the semi-structured key informant review, and the data were analyzed using Colaizzi's method. The results revealed the following themes: embarrassment and psychological impacts from their experiences; mindfulness for their coping mechanism; and respect, instability, and consequences for their insights. Although faced with various difficulties and challenges, the informants found a way to deal with the consequences of their actions, get on with their respective lives, and raise their children.

**Keywords:** premarital sex, consequences, early adulthood, early pregnancy, Philippines.

### RESUMO

Foi relatado que o envolvimento e as atividades sexuais entre adolescentes estão aumentando em todo o mundo. A prevalência de sexo antes do casamento e gravidez continua a aumentar e se tornou muito comum no país. Este estudo tem como objetivo determinar as razões pelas quais os jovens adultos praticam sexo antes do casamento, a fim de compreender e determinar suas experiências, mecanismos de enfrentamento e pontos de vista. Foi utilizado um projeto de pesquisa fenomenológica descritiva. Quatro jovens adultos ou dois casais participaram da revisão semiestruturada com informantes-chave e os dados foram analisados pelo método Colaizzi. Os resultados revelaram os seguintes temas: vergonha e impactos psicológicos de suas experiências; atenção plena para o seu mecanismo de enfrentamento; e respeito, instabilidade e as consequências de suas ideias. Embora tenham enfrentado diversas dificuldades e desafios, as informantes encontraram formas de lidar com as consequências de seus atos, continuar com suas respectivas vidas e criar seus filhos.

**Palavras-chave:** sexo antes do casamento, consequências, início da idade adulta, gravidez precoce, Filipinas.

### INTRODUCTION

One of the populations most prone to participate in dangerous sexual relations, such as an early sexual debut is young women. According to Upadhyay (2006), studying the progression toward first sexual intercourse could improve the understanding of adolescents' sexuality. Moreover, particular pre-coital behaviors are started by men and women at various ages with men often engaging in these behaviors much earlier than women do in most nations.

On the other hand, according to Philippine Orphanage Foundation (2020), 6% of Filipino girls experience teen pregnancy. Although it seems like a little amount, the Global Childhood Report from Save the Children in 2019 shows that it is the second highest rate in Southeast Asia. The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) estimates that 538 infants are delivered to Filipino teen mothers every day as of 2017. Annually, about 200,000 teens become pregnant, and about 40 births each year occur to girls who have not even turned 13 years old.

Locally, according to SunStar Davao (2021), Davao Region is ranked as the highest among the regions in the country on teenage pregnancy, based on the population survey conducted in 2020. Based on the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) survey result conducted in 2017, Davao Region has recorded the highest pregnancy nationwide at 17.9 percent. The active cases of premarital sex between adolescents are mainly juniors and senior high school students ranging from age 13-18 years old.

This study aims to determine the reasons why people engage in premarital sex while still in their adolescents. It also seeks to identify the experiences, coping mechanisms, insights, as well as consequences that the adolescents may have faced with regard to their experiences in sexual engagement and its impact on their overall well-being.

## **METHODS**

This portion presents the overview of the processes and methodology that was used in conducting this study. This includes the research design, population and sampling, data collection, trustworthiness, analysis and interpretation, and ethical consideration that were utilized in this study.

### **Research Design**

This study is a qualitative type of research. According to UTA Libraries (2023), the goal of qualitative research is to gain a thorough understanding of social phenomena in their natural environment. It relies on the first-hand experiences of people as the meaning-making agents in their daily lives and emphasizes the "why" rather than the "what" of social phenomena. Particularly, this research uses a qualitative phenomenological approach as the research design to have a deep understanding of teenagers' engagement in premarital sex through multiple types of data collection.

### **Population and Sampling Method**

There are four early adult participants; 2 males and 2 females, who had their first born at the age ranges of 18-25 years old. This study used a purposive sampling method. The purposive sampling method is used based on the purpose of the study. Specifically, critical case sampling is used in selecting the respondents of this study. According to Patton (2001), critical case sampling is the process of selecting a small number of important cases that have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

The researchers collected the data from the respondents by conducting individual interviews with the respondents in a semi-structured way. Upon conducting the interview, protocols were observed. The researchers oriented the participants about what the study is about, its significance, and the confidentiality of the respondent's identity. According to Patton (2015), interview protocol helps the interviewer explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate a particular topic. The responses of each participant were written down by the researchers during the interview. After conducting the interview, the researchers reviewed the answers of the respondents that have been written down and translated from Vernacular to English. The researchers also sought help from the teachers and Google Translate for the accuracy of the translated responses of the respondents. The researchers made sure that the questions asked will be answered honestly by the participants to ensure the effectiveness of the study.

### **Analysis and Interpretation**

In analyzing the data, the researchers used thematic data analysis. The researchers adapted the modified seven-step Colaizzi's method for data analysis, as referenced by Finlayson (2018), in approaching and conducting the thematic analysis. To understand the transcribed interviews, the researchers read them all several times and then identified important statements. These are words or phrases that directly relate to the subject being studied. In the action of providing statements with significance throughout the procedure, relevant quotes are generally grouped. Then, depending on a number of statements with comparable meanings, themes are created. The researchers repeated steps 1-3 for each interview conducted. The researchers then started creating themes based on the formulated meaning and compiled all comprehensive instructions generated in steps 1-4. The summarized exhaustive descriptions identify the basic structure of the phenomenon. The data reliability is ensured by the researchers through discussions with experts and independent reviewers.

### **Trustworthiness**

According to McGloin (2008), trustworthiness in a qualitative phenomenological approach includes both the validity and reliability dimensions. And its fundamental elements are credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability. Validity is connected to the thorough documentation and ongoing verification of the data that the researcher performs throughout the investigative activity Cypress, Brigitte (2017). The validity of this study is that the researchers make sure that the tools, data, and processes are appropriate and accurate to the research. Reliability refers to the stability of responses to multiple coders of data sets Whitemore, Chase, and Mandle (2001). The fact that the researchers ensure that the information they acquire from the informants has copies made in addition to the originals lends credibility to this study.

Confirmability of qualitative data is assured when data are checked and rechecked throughout data collection and analysis to ensure results would likely be repeatable by others Sagepub (2023). The researchers double-checked the collected data to see if it could be applied to other studies being done on the subject of teenagers engaging in premarital sex to help upcoming researchers in carrying out their studies.

Transferability of qualitative data assures the study findings are applicable to similar settings or individuals according to Dissertation Center (2023). The researchers made sure that the data from this study could be transferred and used in other

studies of a similar nature, ensuring that the research's conclusions could be applied to any related studies that would be undertaken in the future based on the drawn out conclusions from the results given by the informants.

Dependability is the degree to which the study may be reproduced by other researchers and that the results would be consistent, as stressed by Olivia (2018). The study's considerable amount of objective data was made sure by the researchers. So the researchers described their data collection procedures and methodology.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researchers guarantee the participants that the interview was conducted with confidentiality between the interviewer and interviewee. The researchers also ensure the participants that their identity will remain anonymous to the public eye. The participants have agreed to the consent given by the researcher about the nature of the study, the potential participation of the participants, the researcher's identity and the source of funding, the study's purpose, and the publication and use of the findings.

## **RESULTS**

According to the study's objectives, we divided the findings into three sections: the discussion of the experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights of early adults involved in premarital sex.

### **Experiences of Early Adults Involved in Premarital Sex**

Our first question focuses on the experiences of the early adults involved in premarital sex. After we analyzed the data, two themes emerged which are embarrassment, and psychological impacts.

#### **Embarrassment**

The interviewee revealed that after engaging in premarital sex, their perspectives changed, particularly with regard to the subject of sex amongst peers. One of our female informants said that because of her involvement, she developed sensitivity toward the subject of sex and felt shy around her friends. Clara, a 23-year-old female who involved herself in premarital sex and became a first-time parent at the age of 22, has shared her experience.

*"Whenever I attend gatherings with our friends, I get this feeling like I'm way below them. They talk about all sorts of things, like lovemaking, and it makes me feel uneasy. They're all enjoying their single lives while I have to sacrifice my early adulthood because I got pregnant at an early age."* (Transcript 3, page 1, lines 2-3).

Moreover, 1 of the female interviewees revealed that after giving birth to their child, the situation impacted her in many ways. Kelly, a 23-year-old female who had premarital sex in her early adulthood and became a parent at the age of 21, also claims that she feels uneasy about the changes in her life, as well as her physical state.

*"It makes me feel humiliated when my body gets teased and called out a lot since after birth, the changes in my body's shape and size, as well as my appearance, are very noticeable and I can't do anything about it."* (Transcript 4, Page 1, Line 4-5).

Based on the shared experiences of the interviewees, people, especially their friends, and peers, can make it uncomfortable for them when topics about sex and sexual engagement are being discussed. They felt uncomfortable as they found it a sensitive topic to talk about. They also feel awkward and embarrassed when their situation becomes the focus of discussion, even though they were already aware that instances like that may occur. In short, they felt embarrassed.

#### **Psychological Impacts**

Their early involvement in premarital sex impacted the interviewees' life including their mental health. Our interviewee Clara stated that their involvement in premarital sex has caused her stress and depression because she doesn't have any idea how to raise her child.

*"I felt so stuck, depressed, and anxious because I didn't have any idea how to raise a child on my own. I also overthought how to tell my parents about my pregnancy after I found out about it; afraid of their reaction to my being pregnant"*. (Transcript 2, Page 2, Lines 4-5)

Engaging in premarital sex also made one of our male interviewees to be addicted to sex. He became green-minded and easily gets jealous of the people who try to interact with his partner. His engagement led him to a sense of possession towards his partner. Interviewee 1, Dannie, who claims to be addicted to sex explains his addiction after engaging in premarital sex.

*"I became addicted to sex and it's as if I crave for it oftentimes. It just pops up in my head involuntarily and it was driving me crazy. I also have this tendency of getting jealous of other males talking to my wife; it was very unhealthy"*.

(Transcript 1, Page 1, Line 4)

Premarital sex can change your life and health, not just physically but also mentally. Our interviewees Dannie, Ivan, Clara, and Kelly experienced stress, depression, and self-proclaimed addiction after their involvement in premarital sex as they faced the consequences of their actions.

### **Coping Mechanisms of Early Adulthood Involved in Premarital Sex**

The second question of our study focuses on determining their coping mechanism as they faced the challenges of being a parent in their early adulthood. The common coping mechanism that the interviewees have are mindfulness and faith.

#### ***Mindfulness***

Becoming a parent at an early age, especially when it's not planned, can become very hard for some. Certain changes in terms of behavior were also observed by the interviewees to be able to cope with the situation they were in. Kelly, who has a 1-year-old son, shared that in order to face the challenges you have to be mindful and have a fixed mindset.

*"Before, when challenges arise, I found it hard to look for solutions, especially when I need to face them myself. Now, I became more aware of the things that are happening, and I learned to acknowledge the importance of prioritizing the 'now' instead of the things that could've happened if I did things differently".* (Transcript 1, Page 1, Lines 13-14)

The interviewees involved in premarital sex and having a child underwent certain changes in terms of their mindset. The male informants claimed that engaging in premarital sex and needing to raise a child because of it has made them more sensible. Ivan, a 23-year-old male claimed that his experiences and the challenges he had to face after engaging in premarital sex have helped him develop a more mature mindset.

*"My viewpoint changed after our daughter arrived, and I became more mature. I started to value the importance of thinking before deciding or acting up simply based on what comes to my mind."* (Transcript 2, Page 2, Line 1-2).

Having to take care of a child also made the interviewees realize what they need to change, as well as to identify their priorities. Dannie, a 23-year-old male, also added that after their child was conceived, he developed a sense of determination and improvement.

*"After our child was born, I came to a sense of realization that I need to do better and become better for the sake of our child's well-being. My outlook in life has changed and I became a more independent man. Before, I used to always spend my time playing and doing unnecessary things, but now, I have learned to really prioritize my son and my family."* (Transcript 1, Page 2, Line 4-7).

Having a child at an early age can result in both a positive and negative outcome, one of its positive effects is that it can change the way they think and act. It also changed the way they interact with the people around them, especially with their partners. Their involvement solidified the foundation of their relationship, and the challenges that they faced helped them grow to reach maturity at their age.

### **Insights of Early Adulthood Involved in Premarital Sex**

The third question of this study focuses on determining the insights of early adulthood as parents, and their advice to other people. Their insights include having respect for oneself, the effect of instability, and the consequences of their actions.

#### ***Respect***

When entering a relationship, it is crucial to have respect for oneself, for your partner, and for the whole relationship itself. Clara shared and emphasized the importance of the involvement of respect in every relationship.

*"For me, the very foundation of a relationship is respect. When I enter a relationship, I always test if my partner has respect for my body and emotions on whether they can accept my stance about having sex or not and when they don't force me to engage in one".* (Transcript 3, Page 1, Line 4)

Having a common understanding and decision with your partner is an important tool to strengthen the relationship. The statement of Clara emphasized how she gives importance to being respected in a relationship. Her action with her partner may have resulted in an unexpected child but what mattered to her was that they were willing to raise their child because they understood the implication of their actions.

#### ***Instability***

It takes courage, willingness, and certain sacrifices to be able to raise a child as it is a huge responsibility that must be

taken seriously. Clara shared her insights on the importance of being financially and emotionally prepared before and during having a child.

*"My journey during my pregnancy was very hard. My partner and I had no occupation and we did not have a single idea of how we can raise a child when we were already struggling on our own. I really think that we should've had enough savings for my labor and our child's needs."* (Transcript 3, Page 2, Lines 11-12).

Children require lots of attention and raising a child is quite expensive due to their necessities. The informant expressed her regret in not being able to save up for their child's needs. She struggled to find money to finance her labor and it was a very difficult time in her life.

### **Consequences**

The informants expressed their advice to other early adults and teenagers if they were ever to try and engage in premarital sex. Dannie encourages others to never engage in one at an early age.

*"One thing I can say to people is that never try things that may cause you pleasure at the very beginning but hardship in the very end. It's better to enjoy life with other good things than with those that may cause regret and pain."* (Transcript 4, Page 1, Lines 8-9).

Moreover, as a part of discouraging the youngsters with the curiosity of engaging in premarital sex, Kelly emphasized that if people were to engage in premarital sex, they must face its consequences.

*"Don't be hasty when making decisions. If one decides to engage in sexual intercourse without any use of protection, one must be ready to face the possibility of pregnancy and parenthood."* (Transcript 4, Page 1, Line 9).

Some informant gave their insight and advice to other early adults about their encounters and challenges with regard to early parenthood. Ivan shared his words to become an eye-opener to others with growing curiosities about engaging in sexual intercourse.

*"To other men out there, don't encourage or persuade women to engage in sex if you have nothing but lust. Raising a child is a huge responsibility and it's not something you can just escape or leave."* (Transcript 4, Page 1, Lines 9-10).

One informant discouraged the engagement in premarital sex which may lead to the possibility of affecting the relationship one has with your family. Clara said that early parenthood may lead to your family's disappointment.

*"I highly discourage other teenagers and early adults if they ever consider engaging in premarital sex as it may lead to pregnancy and early parenthood. It may also make your parents feel disrespected and disappointed with your actions. Your decision today can affect the course of your future; don't put it at stake and think before you decide"*. (Transcript 3, Page 1, Line 7).

The informant believes that prevention of displeasing possibilities when doing things is better left undone than suffering its consequences. Dannie thinks that teenagers and early adults should enjoy their lives because they will only ever be young once

## **DISCUSSION**

By conducting interviews with the respondents, we learned more about their experiences and coping mechanisms, and we, as the researchers, intend to use our research study to share this information with others who may encounter similar difficulties. This study's primary goal is to identify the experiences, coping mechanisms, and consequences of early adults who engaged in premarital sex to aid others in understanding the difficulties that might arise from having premarital sex, especially in adolescence.

Teen pregnancy is a widespread occurrence with well-established causes and negative effects on a person's health, society, and economy. The adolescent birth rate (ABR) has declined globally, albeit at varying rates in different geographic areas. Significant differences in levels exist both between and within nations. Teenage pregnancies are more common among people with less education or lower socioeconomic standing (WHO, 2023). Due to the alarming rise in teen pregnancies in the Philippines, this study aims to discourage adolescents from engaging in premarital sex by giving them a glimpse of the experiences, coping mechanisms, and consequences of early adults in their lives after engaging in premarital sex.

According to the study's findings, teen mothers face numerous physical, psychological, social, and spiritual challenges, including a constant need for support and training, a lack of ability to plan and make decisions, a lack of maternal skills when dealing with major changes and unanticipated situations, and a high-risk pregnancy and delivery (Mangeli et al., 2017). The respondents shared their experiences as the feeling of embarrassment around their peers with sex-related topics, as well as the changes in their physical appearances, and the psychological impacts after their involvement in premarital sex,

particularly stress, depression, and addiction. Young mothers have a sense of purpose, social acknowledgment, and increased responsibility from becoming mothers. Despite the benefits of parenthood, individuals encountered difficulties that had an impact on their life. The difficulties most frequently were juggling the conflicting demands of school, employment, and taking care of a newborn in a settlement site, as well as adjusting to newfound duties after the birth of the child (Chi Watts et al., 2015).

The early adults state that their coping mechanism as teen parents is mindfulness. A person's level of mental growth known as maturity influences many areas of their life, including their overall demeanor and social interactions. Although it may be assumed that older persons have greater psychological maturity, this is not the case. Age is not a factor in determining maturity; rather, maturity is measured by how accountable you are for your attitude, actions, and the result of your decisions. In the same manner, work, failures, and life experience are what lead to wisdom rather than age (Ramsay, 2020). Our interviewees shared that one characteristic of being mature is realizing what's important and knowing one's priority. Realizing your self-worth and the value of your family is key. For your life to feel truly happy, a pinch of salt is required. It will assist you in making wiser and more content decisions throughout your life. The ability to make better decisions in life comes from maturity (Chap, 2021).

The interviewees learned the value of respect towards themselves and to their partners, their experiences also taught them the importance of preparedness in their lives as they are not prepared for the consequences after their engaging in premarital sex. Setting solid limits is possible when you have a good sense of self-respect. It entails being aware of your principles and ideals as well as accepting of both your strengths and faults. Each person needs to take their time developing the inner virtue of self-respect. It happens after going through disappointments and setbacks in life and understanding how to rebuild. People may behave strangely while juggling the pressures of a growing family and demanding leadership roles. It's simple to fall victim to the fallacy that trying to please everyone is the key to success. Being consistently regarded as a highly good person is less significant than having self-respect (Drury, 2017).

The interviewees also revealed the struggle of instability, especially having no financial savings. Building wealth and having a stable financial future both depend on saving money. You can escape life's uncertainties and could live a quality life by saving money. You can avoid a lot of life's humps and roadblocks by setting aside money in a disciplined way. It can help you in times of need and make sure your family has resources to fall back on in the event of an emergency (PRUDENTIAL, 2021). And before our interview ended, our interviewees shared advice to the adolescence to never engage in premarital sex and enjoy adolescence. They said that you can still enjoy adolescence without engaging in premarital sex to avoid consequences that can change your life forever.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This study highlights the experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights of the early adults engaging in premarital sex. The findings described their experiences of embarrassment and having psychological impacts. However, their developed maturity became their best coping mechanism. They found a way to raise their child and continue living their lives despite societal discrimination and prejudice. Additionally, early adults must deal with the social consequence of being the topic of discussion by other people as it is inevitable. They also discourage others from the curiosity of engaging in premarital sex as it may result in a very challenging experience and regrets. The results of the study may serve as a tool for awareness to other early adults. Being an early parent is a very challenging responsibility to take, especially when it is a choice you made, regardless of whether it is intentional or not. The findings of the study are not only mainly beneficial to the informants but also to other early adult parents and teenagers. The insights and advice of the informants may also be of use to other early adults to become aware of the consequences of engaging in premarital sex.

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