

PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES AND COPING STRATEGIES DURING POSTPARTUM PERIOD OF TEENAGE MOTHERS IN A COASTAL COMMUNITY

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KEYWORDS adolescent motherhood mental health coping strategies postpartum	Abstract Background: Adolescent motherhood in underserved areas increases risks of anxiety, depression, and stress, impacting both maternal adjustment and child development. This study examined psychological challenges and coping strategies during the postpartum period of teenage mothers in a coastal community in Ilocos Sur, Philippines. Objectives: To examine postpartum psychological challenges and coping strategies during the postpartum period of teenage mothers in a coastal community in Ilocos Sur, Philippines. Methods: This descriptive-correlational study surveyed 100 teenage mothers (ages 13-19) in coastal a community in Ilocos Sur, Philippines, assessing socio-demographics, psychological well-being (anxiety, stress, depression, self-esteem), and coping strategies using stratified purposive sampling. Results: Findings showed moderate levels of psychological distress, with anxiety and stress most prominent. Coping strategies included social support, religious practices, and diversionary activities. Socio-demographic factors such as education and family income significantly affected mental health and coping efficacy. Conclusions: This study highlights the need for targeted mental health support and community resources to ease adolescent mothers' psychological burdens, stressing the role of socio-economic stability and family support.
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1. Introduction

Unwanted pregnancy is an important social issue, not least among teenagers [1]. The incidence of adolescent pregnancy is decreasing in developed countries, whereas developing countries like Nepal still report a high incidence [2]. Adolescent pregnancy is a global public health challenge that significantly affects the well-being of young women and their communities. This phenomenon not only has direct implications on the physical and mental condition of adolescent girls but also perpetuates cycles of poverty and limits future educational and employment opportunities [3].

Adolescent motherhood, particularly in low-resource settings, is a complex phenomenon with multifaceted implications for mental health and social well-being. The transition to motherhood in adolescence, a stage already characterized by significant psychosocial development, introduces

distinct psychological challenges that are intensified during the postpartum period. Factors like academic performance, familial problems, and relationship issues have caused adolescents to experience mental health concerns, raising the prevalence of mental disorders worldwide [4]. Teenage mothers are at an elevated risk of mental health issues, including postpartum depression, anxiety, and stress, which can disrupt mother-infant bonding and impair the adolescent's adaptation to her new role [5]. [6] Teenage moms need mental health care because they are stigmatized, have less family support, and have fewer coping mechanisms than adult moms.

Globally, adolescent pregnancies are most prevalent in under-resourced regions, driven by socio-economic disadvantages, inadequate access to reproductive health education, and restrictive healthcare systems [7]. In the Philippines, teenage pregnancy rates remain high, particularly in marginalized and rural communities, contributing to intergenerational cycles of poverty and heightened public health concerns. National initiatives like the Adolescent Health and Development Program have sought to address reproductive health needs among youth; however, few structured programs exist to address the specific psychological needs of adolescent mothers post-pregnancy [8].

This study investigates the psychological challenges and coping strategies during post postpartum period of teenage mothers in a coastal community in Ilocos Sur, Philippines. The research aims to provide insights that could inform community health programs, mental health interventions, and policy-making by examining the socio-environmental and psychological factors impacting these young mothers. The findings will be relevant to healthcare providers, community leaders, and educators working to enhance maternal and child health outcomes and support the long-term mental health of adolescent mothers in similar socio-cultural settings.

Objectives

This study investigated the psychological challenges and coping strategies during the postpartum period of teenage mothers in a coastal community in Ilocos Sur, Philippines. It focused on several key objectives: 1) to describe the socio-demographic profile of the respondents; 2) to assess the extent of psychological challenges experienced postpartum; 3) to evaluate the coping strategies used by teenage mothers; 4) to establish the relationships between the respondents' socio-demographic profiles and the extent of their psychological challenges; 5) to look into the associations between socio-demographic profiles and the level of coping strategies used; and 6) to examine the relationship between the extent of psychological challenges and the coping strategies employed by the teenage mothers.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

This descriptive-correlational study explored the psychological challenges and coping strategies of postpartum teenage mothers in a coastal community in Ilocos Sur, Philippines. It measured the prevalence of psychological challenges and coping strategies and examined the relationships between socio-demographic characteristics and these factors to identify potential correlations.

2.2. Population and Sample

The respondents were teenage mothers (ages 13-19) from three coastal barangays—Fuerte, Villamar, and Puro—in Ilocos Sur, chosen for their high teenage pregnancy rates. Stratified purposive sampling was used to select participants.

2.3. Data Gathering Instrument

Data collection used a structured questionnaire adapted from validated instruments for 25-30 minutes of completion. It had three sections: First, is the socio-demographic information (age, civil status, education, family income, living arrangement, family structure); second is the psychological

challenges (anxiety [9], stress [10], depression [11], self-esteem [12]); and third, the coping strategies (diversionary activities, social support, religious practices [13]).

2.4. Ethical Considerations

Approval for the study was obtained from the university's ethics committee and barangay captains. Informed consent was secured from each respondent, and with the help of barangay health workers, questionnaires were administered and data collected. Ethical guidelines were strictly followed, ensuring privacy, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. The study aimed to benefit respondents and the community by raising awareness and offering insights into the mental health of teenage mothers.

2.5. Data Analysis

Data analysis used 1) frequency counts and percentages to describe socio-demographic characteristics; 2) means to assess psychological challenges and coping strategies; and 3) simple correlation analysis to examine relationships between socio-demographic factors and the psychological challenges and coping strategies.

3. Results and Discussions

The study of teenage mothers in a coastal community in Ilocos Sur, Philippines reveals several critical findings regarding their socio-demographic characteristics and psychological challenges, emphasizing the role of personal factors in shaping coping strategies.

3.1 Socio-demographic attributes of the teenage mothers.

Socio-demographic attributes refer to individuals' or groups' social and demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, income, education, occupation, ethnicity, and marital status.

The majority of teenage mothers in the study were aged 19 (52%), with a minority (4%) being under 15 years old. This suggests that while adolescent motherhood is prevalent in late adolescence, there may be barriers to early access to reproductive health services and social support. The data on civil status indicated that 72% of respondents were single, and 28% were married, underscoring the significant role of unstable family structures and the absence of marital support in navigating the challenges of early motherhood. These findings are consistent with research that highlights the difficulties adolescent mothers face when lacking supportive partners [14]; [15].

Regarding educational attainment, 42% of the respondents had completed high school, and a minority (2%) had only elementary education. This is comparable to the findings of [16] study, which showed that parenting anxiety, role captivity, and the amount of new life meaning derived from parenting are all more prevalent among those with lower educational attainment. Additionally, a striking 80% of respondents reported monthly family incomes below ₱5,000, indicating substantial economic strain. For example, the association between financial stress and mental health outcomes is most often and consistently linked to coping and self-esteem [17]. Only 16% of respondents had a slightly higher family income, reflecting limited economic resources. This may suggest that economic difficulties greatly impact adolescent mothers because they increase their depressed symptoms and adopt tougher parenting techniques. These pressures negatively impact adolescent socioemotional functioning and adjustment. However, cultural values and social support might lessen some of these adverse impacts, underscoring the significance of supportive treatments for adolescent mothers.

Concerning living arrangements, 90% of the respondents lived with their partners, although the stability of these relationships remains uncertain. This finding suggests that while teenage mothers are generally not isolated, the dynamics of these relationships may impact their mental health and well-being. Furthermore, 86% of respondents came from extended family structures, which are often linked

to greater social support, while 6% were from single-parent households, which can exacerbate psychological issues such as depression. The correlation between family structure and coping strategies reinforces the significance of familial and partner support in managing the challenges of early motherhood. Accordingly, changes in family structure, such as marriage or cohabitation, can impact the well-being of mothers [18].

3.2. Extent of psychological challenges experienced by teenage mothers during the postpartum period

Psychological challenges refer to difficulties or struggles related to mental and emotional well-being, such as stress, anxiety, depression, or trauma, that can affect a person's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

Table 1
Summary of Extent of Psychological Challenges among Teenage Mothers

Psychological Challenges	Mean	Interpretation
A. Anxiety	2.59	Moderate
B. Stress	3.20	Moderate
C. Depression	2.74	Moderate
D. Self-esteem	2.82	Moderate

Psychologically, teenage mothers in this study exhibited moderate levels of anxiety, stress, depression, and self-esteem. Financial concerns were the predominant source of anxiety, as respondents expressed significant distress over economic instability. Stress was linked to feeling overwhelmed by responsibilities and the inability to manage life changes, with the lowest scores reflecting difficulties in coping with these transitions [19]. Depression, while moderate, did not escalate to suicidal ideation as these types of thoughts may arise in people who feel entirely hopeless or believe they can no longer cope with their life's demands and difficulties, emphasizing the importance of open, non-judgmental communication [20]; [21]. This was evidenced by the low scores on thoughts of self-harm, which aligns with previous studies that suggest adolescent mothers face emotional strain but are less likely to exhibit extreme psychological responses [22]; [23]. The respondents' self-esteem indicates the significant role of societal judgment and stigma in shaping the self-esteem of teenage mothers [24].

The most prominent psychological challenge identified in the study was stress, which highlights the overarching emotional burdens faced by these young mothers, exacerbated by financial insecurity and the demands of parenting [25].

3.3. Level of coping strategies of teenage mothers in dealing with the encountered psychological challenges

Coping strategies are techniques used to manage stress and emotional challenges, including problem-focused and emotion-focused coping.

Table 2
Summary of Coping Strategies of the Teenage Mothers in Dealing with the Encountered Psychological Challenges

Coping Strategies	Mean	Interpretation
A. Diversionary Activities	2.88	Moderately Effective
B. Social Support	3.44	Highly Effective
C. Religious Practices	3.79	Highly Effective

In coping with these challenges, teenage mothers in Ilocos Sur employed a combination of diversionary activities, social support, and religious practices. The overall coping strategy using diversionary activities was rated moderately effective, with work and other activities providing frequent relief from distress. This finding supports prior research that indicates healthy distractions are more effective than maladaptive coping mechanisms [26].

Social support was rated as "Highly Effective," with family and friends providing significant emotional support. This result underscores the importance of strong social networks in mitigating psychological distress [27].

Religious coping emerged as the most effective strategy. Prayer and seeking God's help were particularly prominent, reflecting the central role of religious practices in the lives of these mothers. This is consistent with studies suggesting that religious coping provides emotional relief and helps manage stress during difficult life transitions [28]

3.4. Relationship between the Extent of Psychological Challenges and the Profile of the Respondents

This section explores the correlation between the severity of psychological challenges and the demographic and personal characteristics of the respondents.

Table 3
Correlation Coefficients Between the Profile of Teenage Mothers in the Different Psychological Challenges

Profile of the Respondents	Psychological Challenges				
	Anxiety	Stress	Depression	Self-Esteem	As a whole
Age	-.049	-.193	.002	-.048	-.088
Civil Status	.069	-.176	.099	.007	.005
Educational Attainment	.036	-.212**	.289**	-.012	-.013
Monthly Income of the mother	.021	.198*	.180	.164	.127
Living Arrangement with the partner	-.342**	-.163	-.398**	-.083	.063
Family Structure	.143	-.529	.032	-.034	.111

Legend:

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The socio-demographic factors such as civil status, educational attainment, and living arrangements were correlated with psychological outcomes and coping strategies. For instance, anxiety was negatively correlated with living arrangements with a partner, suggesting the impact of relationship quality on mental health. Stress was correlated with educational attainment and family income, while religious practices were associated with family income and living arrangements. These correlations highlight the importance of addressing socio-economic disparities and family dynamics in supporting adolescent mothers.

3.5. Relationship between the Level of Coping Strategies and the Profile of the Respondents

The coping strategies of teenage mothers are often shaped by various personal and socio-economic factors, including their religious practices. These practices are notably influenced by their monthly family income and living arrangements with their partner.

Research shows that teenage mothers in challenging living situations, such as uxori-local or viri-local residences, may experience conflicts that affect their independence, with extended family often providing support, although this can sometimes lead to feelings of pressure [29]. Financial hardships, common among those from low socio-economic backgrounds, may prompt teenage mothers to engage

in small-scale businesses to support their children [30]. Additionally, higher levels of social and religious support and spirituality are linked to more structured family routines [31].

Table 4
Correlation Coefficients Between the Profile of the Teenage Mothers
in the Different Coping Strategies

Profile of the Respondents	Coping Strategies			
	<i>Diversiory Activities</i>	<i>Social Support</i>	<i>Religious Practices</i>	<i>As a whole</i>
Age	-.342	-.162	-.095	-.302
Civil Status	-.135	-.180*	-.147	-.220
Educational Attainment	-.232	-.173	-.142	-.267
Monthly Income of the mother	-.014	-.027	-.498*	-.041
Living Arrangement with the partner	-.180	.184*	.242**	-.179
Family Structure	-.578*	.067	.091	.104

Legend:

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

3.6. Relationship between the extent of psychological challenges and the level of coping strategies

The psychological challenges experienced by teenage mothers can significantly impact their coping strategies during the postpartum period. While overall, these challenges are not strongly correlated with coping mechanisms, anxiety is linked to diversionary activities and stress to social support.

Table 5
Correlation Coefficients between the Different Psychological Challenges Experienced
by Teenage Mothers in their Coping Strategies

Psychological Challenges	Coping Strategies			
	<i>Diversiory Activities</i>	<i>Social Support</i>	<i>Religious Practices</i>	<i>As a whole</i>
Anxiety	.363**	.142	-.014	.202
Stress	.261	.290*	.188	.180
Depression	.070	.086	-.085	.057
Self-esteem	.093	.198	.034	.174

Legend:

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Research indicates that teenage mothers often face emotional distress, such as fear and guilt, and lack sufficient support, which worsens their struggles [32]. Perceived social support from family and friends is significantly related to lower depressive symptoms and is found to be more protective against depressive symptoms [33]. Additionally, interventions like home visits and co-parenting programs can help reduce mental health issues [34], highlighting the importance of robust support networks [35].

The findings from this study illuminate the multidimensional challenges teenage mothers face in a coastal community in Ilocos Sur, Philippines, emphasizing the significant roles of socio-demographic factors, psychological well-being, and coping strategies. The data reveal that the majority of the teenage mothers in the study were aged 19, with only a small percentage under 15 years old. This demographic suggests that adolescent mothers' transition to motherhood is influenced by factors such

as physical problems related to birth and breastfeeding, psychological well-being, ability to care for their baby, social support, education, economic strain, and healthcare provision [36].

The predominance of single marital status (72%) among the respondents further highlights the unstable family structures typical in adolescent pregnancies, aligning with other studies that show a correlation between marital quality and mental health.

Educational attainment is also a critical determinant of adolescent mothers' psychological outcomes. In this sample, 42% had graduated from high school, while a small proportion (2%) had only completed elementary school. These findings suggest that lower educational levels are associated with greater challenges in managing the responsibilities of early motherhood, a well-documented pattern in existing literature. This outcome is consistent with [37] study, which discovered a link between adolescent depression and poorer educational attainment. Furthermore, 80% of the respondents said family incomes were less than ₱5,000, demonstrating that financial hardship is a common stressor that fuels emotions of uncertainty, anxiety, and overwhelm associated with parenting. This financial burden is in line with research showing that persistent family financial difficulty, primarily from supportive parenting, contributes to teenagers' mental and physical health issues [38].

The study also found that the respondents' living arrangements were significant predictors of psychological distress. While most respondents (90%) lived with their partners, the quality and stability of these relationships remain uncertain, which may influence their mental health. Unresolved conflict, distress, or unhappiness in romantic relationships are important risk factors for the emergence of mental health issues. According to research, people are more likely to suffer from mental health conditions like stress, anxiety, and depression when they experience persistent challenges in their romantic relationships, such as emotional disconnection, communication breakdowns, or unsolved conflicts [39]. In addition, the family structures of the respondents provide important insights into the potential sources of support. Most of the respondents (86%) lived in extended family settings, where multiple generations may offer emotional and practical support. However, 6% came from single-parent households, a group known to experience heightened psychological stress due to reduced emotional and financial resources. This variation in family structures highlights the importance of family dynamics in adolescent mothers' psychological health. Compared to children in single-parent households, children in households with two married biological parents, single mothers, and single fathers had superior mental health outcomes [40].

In terms of psychological outcomes, the respondents reported moderate levels of anxiety, stress, and depression. Financial concerns were the main source of anxiety, which is in line with previous research that links economic instability to a rise in depressive symptoms in both adolescents and adolescent mothers [41]. The physical difficulties associated with childbirth, psychological health, capacity to care for the child, social support, education, financial pressure, and healthcare needs are some of the elements that impact adolescent mothers' transition to motherhood [42].

Although depression was prevalent, it did not progress to suicidal thoughts, indicating that although teenage moms may have depressed symptoms, they may not always result in more serious mental health conditions. Contrary to the study of [43], maternal depressive symptoms increase the risk of adolescent suicidality, with loneliness playing a significant mediating role, but social withdrawal has no significant effect. This finding implies that while depressive symptoms are common, the psychological support available to these mothers may mitigate the development of more severe mental health issues.

The coping strategies reported by the respondents also underscore the complexity of their psychological resilience. The study found that diversionary activities, social support, and religious practices were central to the coping mechanisms employed by adolescent mothers. The use of work or other activities to divert attention from stress was rated highly, which aligns with previous research that suggests that positive distraction can be an adaptive coping strategy for chronic stressors, leading to higher well-being and positive emotions [44]. More significantly, the reliance on social support was rated as "Highly Effective," indicating the critical role of familial and peer networks in alleviating emotional distress. This is consistent with the study by [45], who found that positive relationships with mothers, fathers, and friends are associated with lower depressive symptoms in adolescents, especially when there is higher friend support. Additionally, religious practices, particularly prayer, were identified as a highly effective coping strategy, reflecting the emotional comfort provided by spiritual beliefs. This finding supports the work of [46], who highlighted Lower depression symptoms within the first year after giving birth are predicted by religiousness and spirituality, with psychosocial resources mediating these relationships.

Correlations between socio-demographic factors and psychological outcomes provide further insights into the antecedents of psychological distress among adolescent mothers. Anxiety was negatively correlated with living arrangements with a partner, suggesting that the quality of relationships plays a role in mental health outcomes. Stress was linked to both family income and educational attainment, suggesting that adolescent mothers' stress levels are increased by both financial instability and lower educational levels. Higher educational attainment may enhance the long-term health outcomes of women who start having children early because education is a social determinant of health that can be changed after a teen gives birth [47].

Depression was also associated with low education, as this is associated with more daily hassles and a decrease in positive mental health and depressive symptoms, mediated by fewer psychosocial resources [48]. These correlations are consistent with the broader literature, which identifies that material hardship predicts higher levels of maternal depressive symptoms [49].

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of this study highlight the complex interrelationships between socio-demographic factors, psychological challenges, and coping strategies among teenage mothers in a coastal community in Ilocos Sur, Philippines. Financial instability, relationship dynamics, and educational attainment are critical determinants of psychological well-being, with economic hardship and relationship instability emerging as the most prominent sources of anxiety and stress. The coping strategies employed by the respondents, including diversionary activities, social support, and religious practices, reflect adaptive mechanisms for managing distress. However, they may not address the underlying causes of their psychological challenges. These findings emphasize the importance of interventions that focus on improving socio-economic conditions, providing educational opportunities, and strengthening family and social support systems to mitigate the psychological burdens faced by adolescent mothers. Policymakers and healthcare providers should prioritize comprehensive support systems to improve young mothers' mental health and overall well-being.

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