‘You can still have dreams for your child’: Filipino young people’s lived experiences of parenthood

Christine Marie Habito,[a,b,d*] Alison Morgan,[b] Cathy Vaughan[a]

[a] *Centre for Health Equity, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne*

[b] *Nossal Institute for Global Health, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne*

[c] *Global Financing Facility, the World Bank Group*

[d] *Global Adolescent Health Group, Burnet Institute*

* Corresponding author; email: marie.habito@burnet.edu.au (ORCiD: 0000-0003-2464-7493)

Abstract

This study aimed to explore Filipino young people's lived experiences of parenthood. We employed narrative analysis of 27 photo elicitation and semi-structured interviews with 10 Filipino adolescent mothers (aged 15-19) and five young fathers (aged 18-24). We found that young parents developed *constructions of 'good' mothers and fathers*, invoking discourses of responsibility, sacrifice, and 'intergenerational repair' as they transitioned into their new 'adult' roles. Learning to deal with judgement and criticism was an inescapable part of *navigating the realities of parenthood*. However, they pushed back against these through discourses of redemption and aligning themselves with their constructions of good parents. Through discourses of 'making it work', young parents managed evolving relationships amid challenging circumstances. In *looking to the future*, they employed discourses of restoration, transformation, and hope, discovering joy and a sense of purpose in fulfilling their adult roles while remaining cognisant of their youth. Programmes and policies aimed at helping young Filipino parents achieve better health and wellbeing outcomes would benefit from considering their circumstances and responding to their specific needs for non-judgmental youth-friendly healthcare, unimpeded access to sexual and reproductive health resources, and supportive home, school, and community environments.

Keywords: parenthood, adolescents, young people, lived experience, Philippines

Background

A decade since the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012 was signed into law, adolescent pregnancy and parenthood continue to be the subject of public health and policy discussion in the Philippines. The increased attention was due to a rising number of births to adolescent mothers in the Philippines over the last two decades (Huda et al. 2021; PSA and ICF 2018). Adolescent childbearing in the Philippines is associated with increasing sexual initiation during adolescence (Habito, Vaughan, and Morgan 2019) in a context where adolescents – especially the unmarried – face social and legal barriers to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) information, services, and supplies (Melgar, Melgar, and Salgado 2014; Melgar et al. 2018). Data indicate that adolescent pregnancy is more common among women from lower wealth quintiles, with lower educational attainment, and from rural areas (PSA and ICF 2018). Mainstream public discourses also associate adolescent pregnancy and young parenthood with 'cycles of poverty', sexual violence, inequality, and adverse impacts on education and income-earning potential (Lalu 2020; Santos 2019). To guide programmes and policies that ensure that Filipino young people reach their full potential, it remains important to understand and address the drivers of adolescent pregnancy and its impacts on the health and life outcomes of young mothers and their children (UNFPA 2021), especially those from resource-constrained backgrounds. It is likewise important to understand the experiences and life outcomes of young mothers' partners. However, literature on Filipino young people's lived experiences of parenthood following adolescent pregnancy is limited.

Young people's experiences of important life transitions need to be understood within the context of socioeconomic status and gender (Furlong and Cartmel 2006). In high-income countries, recent socioeconomic and technological shifts have altered young people's transitions to adulthood (Cote 2000; Wyn 2014), effectively extending the period of 'youth' and delaying milestones traditionally associated with 'adulthood' (e.g., completion of education, securing paid employment, union formation, and parenthood) (Cote 2000; Wyn and White 1997). Yet, in resource-constrained

settings in low- and middle-income countries (like the Philippines), it is not uncommon for young people to experience some of these markers of adulthood at a young age. Research suggests that when life chances and contexts are less secure, the timing of union formation and childbearing can be a rational choice when there are barriers to education and employment, or an unintended outcome of poverty and inequality (Habito, Morgan, and Vaughan 2021; Bennett 2014; Geronimus 1997).

The transition to parenthood is also experienced differently by young mothers and fathers (Gregorio 2018) and is not a static life event but a complex process that takes time (Wyn and White 1997). Studies with young parents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have documented young mothers' struggles with their new maternal identities and caregiving responsibilities (Arboneda et al. 2016; Parungao et al. 2014; Salvador et al. 2016; Gregorio 2018), and young fathers' experiences as characterised by forgone youth and difficulties with (but also commendation for) earning income to support their partner and child (Briones 2013; Gregorio 2018). However, literature on young parenthood in the Philippines limited, and much of what is available is focused on young mothers; there is a lack of knowledge on the experiences and viewpoints of Filipino young fathers. Furthermore, data used in existing studies were typically gathered at a single time point only.

There is a need to expand understanding of young Filipinos' lived experiences of parenthood, how their experiences vary according to gender, and how their reflections and perspectives evolve over time as they assume new adult identities, roles, and responsibilities. This paper derives insights from the life stories of 15 Filipino young women and men who became parents following adolescent pregnancy, some gathered through interviews at two or more time points in time and with the help of photographs that they took themselves. We pay attention to the stages and transitions that young people undergo as they establish their new parental identities and roles (Wenham 2016), manage relationships with their significant others, families, and communities (Neale and Lau Clayton 2014; Whitehead 2001), and carve a meaningful way forward for themselves

and their children (Wyn 2014; Furlong 2009). Our findings will inform the crafting of strategies to improve young parents' health and wellbeing outcomes (and those of their children), so that programmes and policies can be better tailored to their unique needs.

Methods

This study was conducted in Puerto Princesa City in the island province of Palawan in the Philippines. Puerto Princesa is comprised of 19 urban and 47 rural *barangays* (villages) (PSA 2021a). As of the 2020 Census of Population, Puerto Princesa was home to 307,079 people and its population is increasing at more than double the national population growth rate (PSA 2021b). More than half of the population are young people 24 years old and below, and roughly 80% of the city's population identify as Roman Catholic (PSA 2017). Though technically a 'city', Puerto Princesa is composed of a small central business district surrounded by much larger sparsely populated agricultural and forested areas (PSA 2016; OCPDC 2014). The rapid development and population growth observed in Puerto Princesa over the last 20 years is attributed largely to the growth of the tourism industry (Hardon and Tan 2017), and is characterised by evolving social and demographic contexts similar to other rapidly urbanising regional cities in the Philippines.

We used photo elicitation and semi-structured interviews to gather data for this study. Photo elicitation is ideal for gathering information and reflecting on life experiences (Harper 2002) and enabling participants to 'make meaning of their world' by discussing their photos (Mandleco 2013, 78). This method suited our objectives since we wanted to explore young Filipino parents' thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Furthermore, recognising that young peoples' lived experiences of parenthood were part of an ongoing process of 'becoming' (Whitehead 2001) and that their perspectives and experiences could vary over time, we incorporated a qualitative longitudinal approach in our study design by pursuing follow-up semi-structured interviews where possible. Qualitative longitudinal approaches have been used in prior research on the lived experiences of

young parents in high-income country settings (Furstenberg 2007; Neale and Davies 2015; Wenham 2016).

Data used in this study were collected between August 2018 and March 2019. The first author conducted all data collection activities. To facilitate recruitment, we partnered with a local non-government organisation (NGO) that provides health services to young people from resource-constrained communities in Palawan. Participants were approached in person at the NGO's community clinics or referred by the NGO's staff and volunteers. We invited 24 adolescent women (aged 15-19) who were pregnant or parenting, and seven young men whose adolescent partners were either pregnant at the time or had recently given birth. In all, 15 young people (10 female, five male) agreed to participate.

We explained the photo activity to each participant, including the risk of being identified through their photos and how to take photos safely and ethically (e.g., protecting the privacy of human subjects). Participants were asked to take at least one photo relating to each of five themes: feelings on learning of their or their partner's pregnancy; current feelings about the pregnancy; thoughts on being a young parent in their community; hopes, dreams and fears for their child and themselves; and health and support services needed by young people in their community. The first author built rapport and trust with participants by reassuring them that the interview was a safe space to share their stories, and their privacy and confidentiality would be protected. We conducted interviews at participants' homes or quiet public locations where auditory privacy could be assured and used a semi-structured interview guide. When privacy could not be assured at participants' homes, the first author proceeded with the interview but returned at another time when privacy could be assured.

The 10 participants who completed the photo task used their photos to convey rich descriptions of their thoughts and feelings, some through metaphor. However, though all participants were briefed about photo elicitation, three misunderstood the task, while two felt

better able to express themselves through standard (words only) interviews. With these participants, we reverted to semi-structured interviews. We conducted 15 initial interviews (ranging from 20-60 minutes each). Given the transition from pregnancy to parenthood is a period of enormous change, we conducted 12 follow-up interviews (ranging from 12-90 minutes each, between two and six months after their initial interview) with seven participants to capture their perspectives and experiences at different times in this period in their lives. Following consultation with our partner NGO, each participant received a cash incentive of PhP100 (~US$2) after every interview and, where applicable, reimbursed for their transportation costs travelling to and from the interview venue.

All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim by the first author, a native Tagalog speaker and fluent in English. We used QSR International's NVivo 12 to organise and analyse interview transcripts. We analysed our data through narrative inquiry, which seeks to understand 'how people make sense of the world' (Riley and Hawe 2005, 230) by prioritising the viewpoint of the storyteller to understand how they navigate their experiences and what is important to them (Riley and Hawe 2005). We took note of common and unique experiences and sentiments related by each participant and based on these, developed major and sub-themes. Guided by a dialogical research approach, we sought to offer a glimpse into our participants' 'struggles of becoming' and hopes for the future, mindful that their stories were not yet 'finalised' and remained open-ended (Frank 2005). Below, we present insights from their accounts, alongside selected (translated) transcript excerpts. We use pseudonyms to protect participants' confidentiality and original language versions of quotes are in the Supplementary Material.

The study received ethical clearance from the Human Ethics Sub-Committee of the University of Melbourne in Australia (ethics ID 1851023.1) and the De La Salle University Research Ethics Review Committee in the Philippines (ethics ID EXT-008.2017-2018.T2).

Limitations

This study was a component of a larger PhD research project which involved Filipino young people who had experienced adolescent pregnancy and parenthood. Participants were recruited at our partner NGO's community outreach clinics. During recruitment, we informed participants that our study was independent of the NGO. There was no indication that young people's decision whether or not to participate was influenced by our association with the NGO. However, it is possible that our participants were more likely to have positive attitudes regarding parenthood compared to other young parents who did not actively seek healthcare. We were only able to interview five young fathers, yet we found that their stories were quite nuanced and vital for understanding the young parents' specific needs and priorities. Others have found that interventions successful in supporting young mothers ae not necessarily successful in engaging young fathers (Neale and Davies 2015). More research on Filipino young fathers' perspectives would help to identify potential areas where services and support could be targeted to assist them and their families.

As with any small sample study, our findings do not necessarily reflect the experience of all young parents in Puerto Princesa City, Palawan, or the Philippines. However, they provide insight into some of the challenges and realities that young Filipino parents face and are valuable for informing strategies to help them achieve the 'better lives' to which they aspire.

Findings

Fifteen young people from resource-constrained backgrounds participated in this study: 10 adolescent mothers (ages 15-19) who were pregnant or parenting, and five young fathers (ages 18-24) whose partners conceived before age 20. Eleven participants were in cohabiting unions or romantic relationships with their child's father or mother, of whom most were living with or adjacent to the young woman's or the young man's natal family. Two mothers and two fathers were single parents; the young women lived with their natal families, while the young men lived

independently. Almost all were first-time parents; only one mother reported repeat pregnancy experience. Most of the young mothers had not finished high school.

Three main themes emerged from our analysis of our participants' narratives. *Developing constructions of 'good' mothers and fathers* was central to locating their new adult identities as mothers and fathers. In *navigating the realities of parenthood*, participants shared their experiences of dealing with judgement, criticism, and stigma, and managing evolving relationships with their partners and families as they transitioned into their parental roles. Lastly, in *looking to the future*, participants described discovering joy and a sense of purpose through the embodiment of their child and working toward a better life as they contemplated their future as parents.

Developing constructions of a good mother and good father

Our participants developed constructions of good mothers and fathers, reflecting their understanding of their new 'adult' identities and the roles and responsibilities they expected to assume. These constructions were often framed relative to their assessment of their own parents' approach to parenting which were, in turn, typically aligned with traditional gender roles and sociocultural norms. Some young women's constructions of a good mother centred on making sacrifices to meet their child's basic material needs (e.g., milk formula, diapers), while others referred to mothers' responsibility for developmental needs such as love, bonding, and attention. Elaine, 16, was raised mainly by her grandmother when she was younger, while her mother pursued training and employment in another province – a reality for many other Filipino parents who migrate for work to send remittances home to their families. Yet, to Elaine, being a good mother meant raising her child herself and allowing her child to experience the love and quality time together that she did not get from her mother.

[I want to] become a good mother. … As much as possible, I want to raise him. Of course, the love that I didn't experience from Mama, I'll allow my child to experience, and the quality time too.

Elaine, age 16

(baby was one month old)

Similarly, Helena, 16, was seven months pregnant and preparing to be a single mother. She thought of her child as an empty glass; where what she filled the glass with would determine her child's future.

Figure 1. 'Baso' *(Drinking glass)*

It doesn't have any contents, right? It's empty. … It's like, you'll pour water into it until it is filled little by little. … When the child comes out, it will be like that where you need to focus attention on them to raise them well, just to make their future better.

Helena, age 16

(seven months pregnant)

Helena lived with her mother who was a single mother herself. Helena recognised the sacrifices her mother made to raise her and hoped to repay her someday.

Meanwhile, young men's constructions of a good father centred on embracing the role of 'breadwinner' and head of the family. They were acutely aware that social and religious expectations dictated that young men 'answer for' (*panagutan*) unintended pregnancies, and this was the morally 'right' choice, with some citing church leaders as contributing these values. To Kiel, 20, being a good father meant taking responsibility for his pregnant partner and future child – something his father did not do for him. Becoming a 'responsible' father became Kiel's opportunity to right the wrong of the previous generation. He appeared determined to be present in his child's life, though his narrative suggested that he was anticipating that fatherhood would demand much of him. He likened a father's role to a coconut tree that does not buckle under the weight of its fruits or fall during storms.

Figure 2. 'Puno ng niyog' (Coconut tree)

As a father, you should stand, even when there are lots of problems. Like, its fruits, right? They're too heavy. Even when it's already heavy, we should still stand, even if we're experiencing storms. Our example should be to be like a tree that doesn't fall.

Kiel, age 20

(19-year-old partner was five months pregnant)

Navigating the realities of parenthood

Dealing with judgement, criticism, and stigma

Our participants were aware that adolescent parenthood invited judgement and criticism. Some received unwanted and disparaging comments from family and friends, neighbours, bystanders, and healthcare workers. Indy, 15, recalled being scolded while giving birth at a government health facility.

When I gave birth, … they [healthcare workers] were scolding me. They said all kinds of hurtful things to me, as in, while I was giving birth. I was really bad trip *[annoyed]. ... Of course, they should help instead of stressing the person [patient] out. … I already knew that it [getting pregnant] was my mistake. Did they really need to rub it in my face?*

Indy, age 15

(baby was four months old)

All our participants dealt with stigma, but the negative experiences of adolescent mothers who had unintended pregnancies were more distinct. They were called '*malandi*' (promiscuous) and shamed and harassed in their communities, which they typically chose to ignore. However, young mothers and fathers employed different scripts to resist stigma.

Some young mothers quietly resisted stigma by emphasising in their narratives that they chose to see their pregnancies through, unlike 'other' youth who had abortions. Jenny, 16, believed that young mothers like her could 'make up for' unintended pregnancies by choosing to keep their babies instead of having abortions, and that adolescent mothers were capable of doing what adult parents could do for their children.

You can't avoid that there will be people who will judge you. … Most of the people who will judge you are adults. … But even if it was your fault that you got pregnant, you can make up for it because you saw it through. You didn't just let it disappear. ... Even though you are a young mother, you can do what they do for their children – put them through school, raise them well. … You can still have dreams for your child.

Jenny, age 16

(eight months pregnant)

Young fathers endured chastisement from their parents and family members, and experienced stress and anxiety as they came to terms with the news of their partner's pregnancy. However, like young mothers, they also quietly resisted stigma and their negative feelings by emphasising their decision to take responsibility and focusing on proving that they could be good fathers. Noel, 18, became a father when he was 16, and though he did not have his family's support, he took pride in his efforts to support his daughter.

My family, they were very disappointed in me. … I heard [words] from them that I didn't deserve to hear. … I'll accept everything [anyone says], but I took responsibility for her [my daughter]. I took responsibility – I stopped school for one year. I worked for one year to support the baby. Until her birth, I was there.

Noel, age 18

(became a father at age 16)

Our participants believed that it was more common for young men to leave their partners following an unintended pregnancy. As such, young fathers who chose to be held accountable were able to differentiate themselves from 'others' who were 'afraid of responsibility'. Also, for some young men, taking responsibility was the only way to be accepted back into their church communities following a premarital pregnancy.

Managing evolving relationships

Our participants usually lived in multigenerational households, and their relationships with their partners and families changed over time. Young mothers expected their partners to provide financial support and assist with childcare, and unmet expectations between couples resulted in conflict. For Aya, 19, a challenging aspect of being a young mother was when she and her partner fought because he was unwilling to help care for their daughter.

Some conflicts led to relationship dissolution. When we first spoke to Elaine, 16, her baby was one month old, and she and her partner lived with his natal family. At follow-up, the couple had broken up because they fought constantly over unmet expectations, and realised that they were not ready to live together as if married.

It's like it wasn't in his mind yet to have a family because he'd go out every night. … I didn't like that, where I was always the only one taking care of the baby. I also wanted to have someone to help. … Then sometimes, he'd come home at 3 in the early morning and he'd be drunk.

Elaine, age 16

(baby was nine months old)

Elaine moved into her mother's home, which she found difficult now that she was a mother herself. However, Elaine did her best to maintain an amicable relationship because she needed her mother's support.

Like Elaine, other young mothers and fathers relied heavily on family support as they transitioned into their new parental roles, with some grandparents taking an active role in childcare. However, over time, some couples discovered that the nature and extent of family support was not constant, and overreliance on already resource-constrained families resulted in conflict within multigenerational households. For example, at our first interview, Giselle, 15, seemed content living with her boyfriend's family. At follow-up, she reported that family relationships had since grown strained because her partner refused to work, placing the financial burden for supporting the couple on his parents and fuelling resentment toward the couple. Because of this, Giselle was preparing to move to her mother's home province and live with her grandmother.

> *They [his family] have had so many problems, and they said they're not rich. That's why she [his mother] said it would be better for me to just give birth in our place [my mother's home province] ... so she [his mother] wouldn't have any [added] problems.*
>
> *Giselle, age 15*
>
> *(seven months pregnant)*

In contrast, some participants experienced positive changes to family relationships over time, though this was more pronounced among young fathers than mothers. For example, at first interview, Leo, 19, lamented that his parents were angry and disappointed, and he was banned from participating in church activities because of his girlfriend's premarital pregnancy. At follow-up, Leo happily reported that he felt closer to his parents after the birth of his child; his parents' anger and disappointment had been superseded by their joy of having a grandchild. Also, being head of a family and able to offer financial assistance to his natal family earned him adult status and the

respect of his parents.

Looking to the future

Discovering joy and a sense of purpose

Young parents adapted to the new demands on their time and energy but experienced restorative and transformative effects of parenthood. Young mothers complained about *puyat* (sleep deprivation), especially when their baby was sick, while young fathers talked about overworking to provide for their families. Nevertheless, young mothers and fathers highlighted how their child brought them joy and 'made tiredness disappear'.

Two young men's narratives conveyed how becoming a father changed their lives for the better, prompting them to turn from deviant behaviours and be more responsible. Noel was 16 when he and his girlfriend had an unintended pregnancy. Noel did not know how to deal with the news and 'lost his way' but later changed his direction in life for his daughter.

> *When I found out [about the pregnancy], I was really nothing. I lost my way, from so much stress, being so depressed, with no one on my side. ... I tried going into vices, [joined a] fraternity. … I became a troublemaker, my life became aimless. ... When I started to go to church, it was then that I realised that the things I had been doing were wrong. … I love the child very much. She [my daughter] is the reason why I changed my life little by little.*
>
> *Noel, age 18*
>
> *(became a father at age 16)*

Similarly, Oscar, 22, did not have a plan for himself when his then-17-year-old girlfriend became pregnant. Looking back, he credited his newfound direction and sense of purpose to his daughter.

I'd say it was a good thing she [my daughter] came into our lives, … because if not, I wouldn't become responsible with my life, because I didn't have a plan for my life back then. … I became responsible [and] my dreams came to life more because what I'm doing is no longer just for me.

Oscar, age 23

(became a father at age 22)

For these young men, their children became the motivation they needed to take charge of their lives.

Working toward a better life

Our participants hoped that their children would be able to live better lives than their own. They wanted their children to be spared from the disadvantages and hardships they endured growing up. Indy, 15, shared that her baby was often unwell, which she linked to her family not always having enough food to eat (Figure 3). She hoped for her child to always to have food and grow up healthy.

Figure 3. 'Pagkain' *(Food)*

I want the food [containers] to always be full ... so when my child grows up, I want her to always be healthy. I don't want her to always be getting sick.

Indy, age 15

(baby was four months old)

Likewise, Belle, 19, recalled how her family sometimes did not have enough food to eat. She wanted for her child to graduate from high school and have a good life. Beyond just having food to eat, Belle wanted for her child to enjoy delicious food, and to be able to play freely with other children (Figure 4).

Figure 4. 'Pangarap' (Dream).

I want her to finish her studies because we [my partner and I] weren't able to finish our studies. ... [I want her to] have a good life; that she will not experience what we did before, where our main dish, sometimes it was just salt, sometimes nothing! Soy sauce, oil – that was it. … [I want her to have food] that is delicious.

Belle, age 19

(seven months pregnant)

Young parents prioritised their children yet they seemed to recognise that their own life stories were still being written and held onto ambitions for themselves. Almost all the young mothers aspired for further education, whether it was to graduate from high school or go onto college (university) or a vocational course. Most anticipated that it would be challenging to work toward their educational and career goals in addition to their responsibilities as mothers. However, they believed that they would achieve their goals with some hard work and provided they had support from their families. For example, Belle, 19, dreamed of returning to school and did not see motherhood as a hindrance because she had the support of her partner and their natal families (Figure 5). Her conviction was consistent from the time she was pregnant (first interview) and a few months after she had given birth (follow-up).

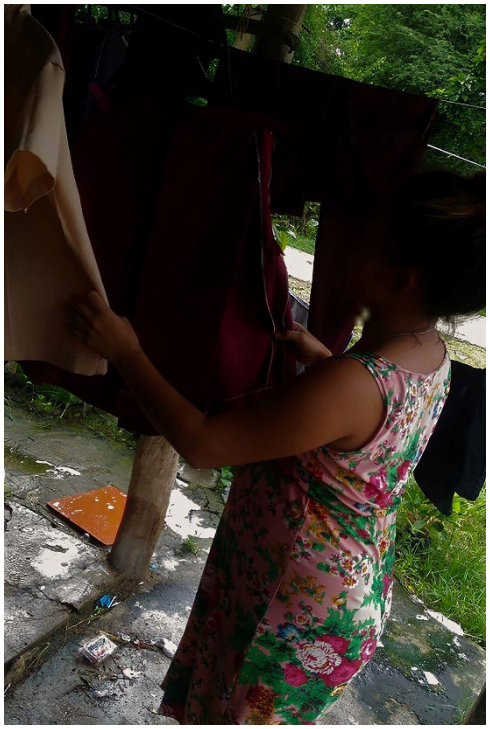

Figure 5. 'Tumitingin ng uniform' *(Looking at uniforms).*

Sometimes I feel envious of single girls, those who are still studying. I want to study too, so I can also support my child, so that she can have a good life.

Belle, age 19

(seven months pregnant)

In contrast, one young mother discovered that juggling education and parenthood was challenging. Elaine, 16, was close to earning her high school diploma through the Alternative Learning System[1] (ALS), but struggled to be simultaneously a student and a mother because she could not fully focus on her studies.

> *[Being a mother is difficult] when I have to be a mommy and study simultaneously. … I can't focus. Especially now, … while I am reviewing and he [my baby] is not with me. … I keep thinking of him. Even when he is far from me, my mind is with him.*
>
> *Elaine, age 16*
>
> *(baby was nine months old)*

Some young mothers hoped to seek employment or start small businesses after giving birth, but they were aware that this would be contingent on the childcare options available to them. It was evident that when forced to choose, they prioritised their new roles as mothers over their educational or employment aspirations.

Parenthood also constrained some young fathers' education and career prospects, but to a lesser extent than young mothers since young fathers' mobility was much less affected by childcare responsibilities.

Discussion

Photo elicitation helped some – though not all – of our participants to reflect on their experiences and express feelings, hopes, and fears for themselves and their children, some using metaphor. We

[1] The Alternative Learning System (ALS) is a free education program for Filipinos who cannot complete their basic education through the formal system.

found that young parents demonstrated more thoughtfulness, agency, and purpose than they are often given credit for in public discourses regarding their lives and the ways that services and opportunities are provided to (or denied) them. Transitions to parenthood were experienced differently by young mothers and fathers and they also varied over time, but amid adversity, young parents derived meaning and optimism from their new parental identities and roles.

Our participants were cognisant that the timing of their parenthood defied contemporary social ideals, yet they resisted social expectations that they would ultimately fail (Whitehead 2001) and projected agency and confidence that they knew how to be good parents to their children (Wenham 2016). In their narratives, they drew on discourses of responsibility and sacrifice as they established their parental identities. Their constructions of good parents aligned with traditional gender roles and sociocultural expectations that assigned domestic and caregiving responsibilities to women and income-generating responsibilities to men (Serquina-Ramiro 2014; Alampay 2014) – adult roles that they endeavoured to fulfil despite their youth. Young mothers and fathers also developed a sense of how they could be good parents to their children by referring to what they perceived their parents had done right and seeking to emulate them, or what their parents had done wrong and seeking to be and do better (Gettler et al. 2019) – what Tuffin, Rouch, and Frewin (2010, 493) referred to as 'intergenerational repair.'

For young mothers, a 'good mother' was responsible for her child's basic needs (Arboneda et al. 2016), which often meant sacrificing her own needs (Natividad 2019; Rosario, Domocmat, and Oniashvili 2016) and accepting economic dependence on her partner and family (Rosario, Domocmat, and Oniashvili 2016; Gregorio 2018; Gipson et al. 2012). Meanwhile, young fathers conceptualised being a 'good father' as taking responsibility and providing for his partner and children (Gipson et al. 2012; Alampay 2014); ideals that were influenced by the examples set by other men in their proximal environments, sociocultural and gender norms, and expectations of their religious communities.

Young parents took ownership over their circumstances and – drawing on their constructions of good parents – adopted discourses of redemption as they navigated the day-to-day realities of parenthood. As also observed by Wenham (2016), participants were acutely aware of that their status as young parents was highly stigmatised (Arboneda et al. 2016; Monterona 2020). This negative feedback was due to what Whitehead (2001) referred to as 'social horror' evoked by teenage pregnancy, affecting not just the young parent but by association, their families as well. Yet, in our study, some participants quietly resisted negativity through 'passive coping mechanisms' to stigma (Yardley 2008). They emphasised that in choosing to see their (or their partner's) pregnancy through, they were in a more morally 'right' position than 'other' youth who chose abortion or to abandon their pregnant partners. This belief allowed them to find redemption in choosing the 'right path' (Barcelos and Gubrium 2014) and 'negate the criticisms' they have received (Yardley 2008). For young fathers, knowing that it was more common for their male peers to avoid responsibility for pregnancy valorised their decision to defy the norm (Enderstein and Boonzaier 2015) and granted them confidence in their ability to step up to the role of 'breadwinner.' Taking responsibility was also a way to restore their sense of belonging (Wyn 2014) in their church communities.

Young parents' intimate relationships evolved over time, and they engaged in discourses of 'making it work'. Partner relationships were tested by impending and new parenthood, in some cases leading to conflict and relationship dissolution. At the same time, young parents recognised the importance of (and relied heavily on) family networks as they transitioned to their new adult roles and identities (MacDonald et al. 2005; Neale and Lau Clayton 2014; McDermott and Graham 2005). In some cases, young parents' dependence on their natal families coupled with economic hardship strained relations within multigenerational households (see also Monterona 2020; Astuti, Hirst, and Bharj 2021). Yet, some young men described gaining independence and symbolic capital through the adult status conferred by being spouses, heads of family, and 'breadwinners'. These are similar to the findings of Reeves (2006) that adolescent fathers drew on old and new support networks and new capital as they worked toward being more responsible.

Amid challenging circumstances, our participants drew on discourses of restoration, transformation, and hope as they envisioned their futures in their new parental roles. Their children became physical reminders of why they persevered through sleepless nights and tiring workdays, dissipating fatigue, and providing the momentum that some needed to change direction in life (Reeves 2006; Tuffin, Rouch, and Frewin 2010; Enderstein and Boonzaier 2015; Rosario, Domocmat, and Oniashvili 2016). Young mothers whose schooling was disrupted by pregnancy continued to aspire to complete their transitions through education and work, and were optimistic that they would eventually succeed with the help of their partners and families. This aligns with the findings of McDermott and Graham (2005) that young mothers from resource-constrained backgrounds are aware of their positions as they work towards good lives for themselves and their children, drawing on the resources available to them to achieve their goals. Our findings show that our participants' transitions to adulthood were a non-linear work in progress – though they were already embracing their adult, parental roles, they held on to 'youthful' aspirations which they hoped would aid in their transition to adulthood.

Our findings have important programmatic and policy implications for young people's SRH and wellbeing in the Philippines. First, adolescent childbearing – though increasingly common in the Philippines, especially in resource-constrained communities – continues to be stigmatised at different levels of social life (see also Monterona 2020), and like two of our participants, some young mothers are treated poorly during childbirth. Disrespect and abuse by health workers is among the common barriers to facility-based delivery among women in low- and middle-income countries (Bohren et al. 2014). Strategies that address young parents' experiences of judgement, criticism and stigma – such as provision of training and ongoing support to service providers to help reduce women's mistreatment experiences during delivery and create enabling environments for quality care (Asefa et al. 2020; Morgan 2016) – will be critical toward upholding their right to health and quality care.

Second, there needs to be a much broader rethinking of how young parents are perceived and received in their homes, schools, communities, online spaces (e.g., news and social media), and society. Dominant discourses of 'teen pregnancy' in the Philippines frequently invoke its adverse impacts on young people's futures and the economy by perpetuating 'intergenerational poverty' (Magsino 2020; Reysio-Cruz 2019). However, early childbearing is more 'a marker rather than a cause' of underprivilege and socioeconomic disadvantage (Furstenberg 2016, p.1). Studies in the Philippines have indeed found that prior adversity and disadvantage are important antecedents of both intended and unintended pregnancy for young people from resource-constrained backgrounds (Habito, Morgan, and Vaughan 2021; Gregorio 2018). However, there are many other determinants at play, including social and legal barriers to young people's access to essential SRH information, services, and supplies (Melgar and Carrera-Pacete 2016; Melgar et al. 2018; Melgar, Melgar, and Salgado 2014). While our findings affirmed that parenthood complicates young people's – especially young mothers' – efforts to achieve their educational and career goals, it is important to bear in mind that these young people remain under the same structural conditions that facilitated their transition to parenthood. As stated by Furstenberg (2016, p.3), 'unless we address the conditions that lead up to parenthood, we cannot hope to change the destinies of the disadvantaged whether they have a birth in early life or not.'

Actors from all levels of society need to focus on 'nurturing agency' (Kelly 1996) in young people by creating more enabling environments for them to make informed choices and supporting them as they 'attempt to "do the right thing" under difficult circumstances' (Kelly 1999, p.62). Young parents require supportive environments and social protections beyond what their partners and families can provide – needs that the proposed Prevention of Adolescent Pregnancy Act in the Philippine House of Representatives and the Senate hopes to address. If signed into law, this would be an important step toward ensuring that young Filipino parents have some social support to continue to work toward their life goals.

Conclusion

Filipino young people's lived experiences of parenthood highlight their challenges and needs as they take on their new identities and roles as parents. However, they also demonstrate thoughtfulness, agency, and purpose as they recall those experiences and envision aspirations for their children, and themselves. While public opinion on SRH in the Philippines is gradually becoming more progressive, structural inequalities continue to hamper young people's access to SRH resources. Until such time that Filipino young people have the resources and enabling environments they need to avoid unintended pregnancies, it will remain imperative for government and non-government programmes and policies to consider strategies that respond to young parents' unique needs. These include ensuring non-judgemental youth-friendly healthcare, unimpeded access to essential SRH resources, and supportive home, school, and community environments.

REFERENCES

Alampay, Liane Peña. 2014. "Parenting in the Philippines." In *Parenting across cultures*, 105-21. Springer.

Arboneda, Eden, Mary Joyce Cantor, John Nathan Dizon, Denmark Malicse, and Great I Am WC Gismundo. 2016. "Roles and Responsibilities of Teenage Mothers: A Basis for Intervention Measures." *Southeast Asian Journal of Science and Technology* 1 (1).

Asefa, Anteneh, Alison Morgan, Samson Gebremedhin, Ephrem Tekle, Sintayehu Abebe, Hema Magge, and Michelle Kermode. 2020. "Mitigating the Mistreatment of Childbearing Women: Evaluation of Respectful Maternity Care Intervention in Ethiopian Hospitals." *BMJ Open* 10 (9):e038871. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2020-038871.

Astuti, A. W., J. Hirst, and K. K. Bharj. 2021. "Adolescent fathers' experiences in Indonesia: a qualitative study." *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth* 26 (1):201-10. doi: 10.1080/02673843.2021.1901749.

Barcelos, Christie A., and Aline C. Gubrium. 2014. "Reproducing Stories: Strategic Narratives of Teen Pregnancy and Motherhood." *Social Problems* 61 (3):466-81. doi: 10.1525/sp.2014.12241.

Bennett, Linda Rae. 2014. "Early marriage, adolescent motherhood, and reproductive rights for young Sasak mothers in Lombok." *Wacana* 15 (1):66-86.

Bohren, Meghan A., Erin C. Hunter, Heather M. Munthe-Kaas, João Paulo Souza, Joshua P. Vogel, and A. Metin Gülmezoglu. 2014. "Facilitators and Barriers to Facility-Based Delivery in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Qualitative Evidence Synthesis." *Reproductive Health* 11 (1):71. doi: 10.1186/1742-4755-11-71.

Briones, Richard N. 2013. "Journey to fatherhood: reflections on experiences and needs of teenage fathers." *The Summit 2013*:101-36.

Cote, James E. 2000. *Arrested Adulthood: The Changing Nature of Maturity and Identity*, *Arrested Adulthood*. New York, USA: New York University Press.

Enderstein, A. M., and F. Boonzaier. 2015. "Narratives of young South African fathers: redefining masculinity through fatherhood." *Journal of Gender Studies* 24 (5):512-27. doi: 10.1080/09589236.2013.856751.

Frank, Arthur W. 2005. "What Is Dialogical Research, and Why Should We Do It?" *Qualitative Health Research* 15 (7):964-74.

Furlong, Andy. 2009. "Revisiting transitional metaphors: reproducing social inequalities under the conditions of late modernity." *Journal of education and work* 22 (5):343-53.

Furlong, Andy, and Fred Cartmel. 2006. *Young people and social change*: McGraw-Hill Education (UK).

Furstenberg, Frank F. 2007. "Chapter 7: Destinies of the Disadvantaged." In *Destinies of the Disadvantaged*, 160-74. Russell Sage Foundation.

———. 2016. "Reconsidering Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood." *Societies* 6 (4). doi: 10.3390/soc6040033.

Geronimus, Arline T. 1997. "Teenage Childbearing and Personal Responsibility: An Alternative View." *Political Science Quarterly* 112 (3):405-30. doi: 10.2307/2657564.

Gettler, Lee T., Patty X. Kuo, Abet Bas, and Judith B. Borja. 2019. "The Roles of Parents in Shaping Fathering Across Generations in Cebu, Philippines." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 81 (3):662-78. doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12568.

Gipson, Jessica D, Socorro A Gultiano, Josephine L Avila, and Michelle J Hindin. 2012. "Old Ideals and New Realities: The Changing Context of Young People's Partnerships in Cebu, Philippines." *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 14 (6):613-27. doi: 10.1080/13691058.2012.684222.

Gregorio, Veronica. 2018. "The Only Exception: Teenage Pregnancy in the Philippines." *Review of Women's Studies* 28:28.

Habito, Christine Marie, Alison Morgan, and Cathy Vaughan. 2021. "Early union, 'disgrasya', and prior adversity and disadvantage: pathways to adolescent pregnancy among Filipino youth." *Reproductive Health* 18 (107):1-19. doi: 10.1186/s12978-021-01163-2.

Habito, Christine Marie, Cathy Vaughan, and Alison Morgan. 2019. "Adolescent sexual initiation and pregnancy: what more can be learned through further analysis of the demographic and health surveys in the Philippines?" *Bmc Public Health* 19 (1142). doi: 10.1186/s12889-019-7451-4.

Hardon, Anita P, and Michael L (eds) Tan. 2017. *Modernizing Frontier: Chemical Transformations of Young People's Minds and Bodies in Puerto Princesa*. Quezon City, Philippines: Department of Anthropology, University of the Philippines Diliman.

Harper, Douglas. 2002. "Talking About Pictures: A Case for Photo Elicitation." *Visual Studies* 17 (1):13-26. doi: 10.1080/14725860220137345.

Huda, M. Mamun, Martin O'Flaherty, Jocelyn E. Finlay, and Abdullah Al Mamun. 2021. "Time trends and sociodemographic inequalities in the prevalence of adolescent motherhood in 74 low-income and middle-income countries: a population-based study." *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health* 5 (1):26-36. doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-4642(20)30311-4.

Kelly, Deirdre M. 1996. "Stigma Stories: Four Discourses, About Teen Mothers, Welfare, and Poverty." *Youth & Society* 27 (4):421-49. doi: 10.1177/0044118X96027004002.

———. 1999. "Chapter 5: A Critical Feminist Perspective on Teen Pregnancy and Parenthood." In *Teen Pregnancy and Parenting*, edited by James Wong and David Checkland, 52-70. University of Toronto Press.

Lalu, Gabriel Pabico. 2020. "PopCom wants more legislation vs teenage pregnancy amid rising, alarming data." *Inquirer.net*.

MacDonald, Robert, Tracy Shildrick, Colin Webster, and Donald Simpson. 2005. "Growing up in poor neighbourhoods: The significance of class and place in the extended transitions of 'socially excluded'young adults." *Sociology* 39 (5):873-91.

Magsino, Dona. 2020. "More Girls Aged 10-14 Get Pregnant in the Philippines — Popcom." GMA News Online, Accessed 28 February 2020. https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/nation/726028/more-girls-aged-10-14-get-pregnant-in-the-philippines-popcom/story/.

Mandleco, Barbara. 2013. "Research with Children as Participants: Photo Elicitation." *Journal for Specialists in Pediatric Nursing* 18 (1):78-82. doi: 10.1111/jspn.12012.

McDermott, Elizabeth, and Hilary Graham. 2005. "Resilient Young Mothering: Social Inequalities, Late Modernity and the 'Problem' of 'Teenage' Motherhood." *Journal of Youth Studies* 8 (1):59-79. doi: 10.1080/13676260500063702.

Melgar, Junice L. D., and Jocelyn Carrera-Pacete. 2016. "Understanding Catholic Fundamentalism in the Philippines: How Conservative Religious Teachings on Women, Family and Contraception Are Wielded to Impede the Reproductive Health Law and Other Reproductive Health Policies." In, 25. Quezon City, Philippines and Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Likhaan Center for Women's Health and Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW).

Melgar, Junice L. D., Alfredo R. Melgar, Mario Philip. R. Festin, Andrea J. Hoopes, and Venkatraman Chandra-Mouli. 2018. "Assessment of Country Policies Affecting Reproductive Health for Adolescents in the Philippines." *Reproductive Health* 15 (1). doi: 10.1186/s12978-018-0638-9.

Melgar, Junice L.D., Alfredo R. Melgar, and Joy Salgado. 2014. "Country Profile on Universal Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health: Philippines." In, 20. Likhaan Center for Women's Health (Likhaan) and Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW).

Monterona, Adreal Denver. 2020. "Young ones having younger ones: Adolescent mothers' repeated pregnancy experiences in the Philippines." *Simulacra* 3 (2):153-64.

Morgan, Alison Patricia. 2016. "Towards Timely Quality Delivery Care: A Case Study of Palpa District, Western Nepal." University of Melbourne.

Natividad, Maria Dulce F. 2019. "Catholicism and Everyday Morality: Filipino Women's Narratives on Reproductive Health." *Global Public Health* 14 (1):37-52. doi: 10.1080/17441692.2018.1471145.
Neale, Bren, and Laura Davies. 2015. "Seeing young fathers in a different way." *Families, relationships and societies* 4 (2):309-13. doi: 10.1332/204674315X14352353233301.
Neale, Bren, and Carmen Lau Clayton. 2014. "Young Parenthood and Cross-Generational Relationships: The Perspectives of Young Fathers." In *Understanding Families Over Time: Research and Policy*, edited by Janet Holland and Rosalind Edwards, 69-87. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
OCPDC. 2014. "Comprehensive Land Use Plan for the City of Puerto Princesa 2013-2022." In. Puerto Princesa, Palawan, Philippines: Office of the City Planning and Development Coordinator (OCPDC), City of Puerto Princesa.
Parungao, Cristopher R, Lowell P Bautista, Roslyn Mariano, Vilma M Bonifacio, and Marjorie V Aguinaldo. 2014. "Life Brought at a Tender Age: The Lived Experiences of Filipino Teenage Pregnant Women." *Asia Pacific Journal of Multidisciplinary Research* 2 (1):214-8.
PSA. 2016. "Philippine Population Density (Based on the 2015 Census of Population)." In *2015 Census of Population*. Manila, Philippines: Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA).
———. 2017. "Philippine Population Surpassed the 100 Million Mark (Results from the 2015 Census of Population)." Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), Accessed 26 October 2017. https://psa.gov.ph/population-and-housing/node/120080.
———. "Barangays in the City of Puerto Princesa (Capital)." Philippine Standard Geographic Code (PSGC), Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), Accessed 5 July 2021. https://www.psa.gov.ph/classification/psgc/?q=psgc/barangays/175316000&page=1.
———. 2022. "Highlights of the MIMAROPA Region Population 2020 Census of Population and Housing (2020 CPH)." Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), Accessed 4 April 2022. https://psa.gov.ph/population-and-housing/node/165014.
PSA, and ICF. 2018. *Philippines National Demographic and Health Survey 2017*. Quezon City, Philippines and Rockville, Maryland. USA: Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) and ICF.
Reeves, Jane. 2006. "Recklessness, rescue and responsibility: Young men tell their stories of the transition to fatherhood." *Practice* 18 (2):79-90. doi: 10.1080/09503150600760082.
Reysio-Cruz, Matthew. "Teen Pregnancies Now 'Nat'l Social Emergency'." Philippine Daily Inquirer, Accessed 23 August 2019. https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1156646/teen-pregnancies-now-natl-social-emergency.
Riley, T., and P. Hawe. 2005. "Researching Practice: The Methodological Case for Narrative Inquiry." *Health Educ Res* 20 (2):226-36. doi: 10.1093/her/cyg122.
Rosario, Arceli H, Maria Carmela Domocmat, and Shorena Oniashvili. 2016. "Still a Teen, Already a Mother: Understanding the Teen Motherhood Phenomenon through Photovoice." *International Forum* 19 (2):47-63.
Salvador, Jordan Tovera, Ben Ryan Jucay Sauce, Marc Oneel Castillo Alvarez, and Ahrjaynes Balanag Rosario. 2016. "The Phenomenon of Teenage Pregnancy in the Philippines." *European Scientific Journal* 12 (32):20. doi: doi: 10.19044/esj.2016.v12n32p173.
Santos, Ana P. 2020. "Rape, Incest and Inequality – the Other Reasons for Teen Pregnancies [Opinion]." Rappler, Accessed 3 April 2020. https://www.rappler.com/thought-leaders/244402-dash-of-sas-rape-incest-inequality-other-half-story-statistics-teen-pregnancies-philippines.
Serquina-Ramiro, Laurie. 2014. "Adolescent Pregnancy in the Philippines." In *International Handbook of Adolescent Pregnancy: Medical, Psychosocial, and Public Health Responses*, edited by Andrew L. Cherry and Mary E. Dillon, 505-22. Boston, MA: Springer US.
Tuffin, Keith, Gareth Rouch, and Karen Frewin. 2010. "Constructing adolescent fatherhood: responsibilities and intergenerational repair." *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 12 (5):485-98. doi: 10.1080/13691051003629359.

UNFPA. 2021. "My Body is My Body, My Life is My Life: Sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people in Asia and the Pacific." In, 148. Bangkok, Thailand: United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

Wenham, Aniela. 2016. ""I know I'm a good mum–no one can tell me different." Young mothers negotiating a stigmatised identity through time." *Families, relationships and societies* 5 (1):127-44.

Whitehead, Elizabeth. 2001. "Teenage pregnancy: on the road to social death." *International Journal of Nursing Studies* 38 (4):437-46. doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/S0020-7489(00)00086-9.

Wyn, Johanna. 2014. "Conceptualizing Transitions to Adulthood." *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 2014 (143):5-16. doi: https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.20100.

Wyn, Johanna, and Rob White. 1997. "Youth transitions." In *Rethinking Youth*, 96-119. Sydney, Australia: Taylor & Francis Group.

Yardley, Elizabeth. 2008. "Teenage mothers' experiences of stigma." *Journal of Youth Studies* 11 (6):671-84. doi: 10.1080/13676260802392940.