




Original Article

Tatay na si Totoy: Exploring Stressors and Coping Strategies of Teenage Fathers in Selected Barangays in San Pablo City, Laguna

Mariella S. Ramirez, Freny Burberry C. Caliwagan, Ma. Jerlyn B. Paet , Ma. Gloria F. Maningas ,
John Clifford M. Alvero 

Author Information:

San Pablo Colleges, San Pablo City, Laguna,
Philippines

Correspondence:

jc.alvero@sanpabcolleges.edu.ph

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Abstract. Teenage fatherhood is a significant socio-cultural, economic, and developmental problem, as it can disrupt educational attainment, constrain employment trajectories, heighten psychosocial stress, and limit access to support systems during a critical stage of life. Despite these consequences, it remains underexamined where attention has historically centered on adolescent motherhood, leaving the specific experiences and needs of teenage fathers insufficiently understood. This imbalance in literature obscures the broader implications of early fatherhood for young men, their children, and the communities in which they are embedded. This study examined the antecedent events leading to early fatherhood, the stressors experienced by teenage fathers, the coping strategies they employ, and the outcomes of these coping processes. Grounded in the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, a phenomenological design explored the lived experiences of twelve (12) teenage biological fathers aged 13–19 years with children aged one year or older from selected barangays in San Pablo City, Laguna, through purposive sampling. Data collection employed structured face-to-face interviews using a researcher-developed, expert-validated 24-item guide. Thematic analysis was validated through expert review. Four themes emerged: (1) socioecological normalization of adolescent risk-taking; (2) economic precarity and provider role strain; (3) resilience through relational and economic resourcefulness; and (4) transformative fatherhood—sacrifice, reprioritization, and persistent vulnerability. The study contributes local, community-based evidence and underscores the value of strength-based, culturally responsive interventions. Findings inform practice by guiding comprehensive sex education and support systems to prevent unintended early fatherhood, address mental health challenges in early parenting, and foster help-seeking despite persistent barriers.

Keywords: Adolescents; Resilience; Stress and coping; Teenage fatherhood; Teen risk-taking.

Teenage fatherhood poses a significant public health and social challenge in the Philippines because it disrupts the developmental trajectory of young males during adolescence, a period marked by identity formation and socioemotional change (Bamishigbin Jr. et al., 2019). Defined as fatherhood before age 20, it often emerges amid external pressures such as poverty, peer norms, and limited adult guidance, which can

intensify role confusion and early family formation (McLeod, 2025). Although adolescent fertility has declined in many countries over the past two decades, the Philippines remains an exception, with recorded cases of males aged 18 and below fathering children increasing from 3,148 in 2010 to 5,054 in 2018 (Maghupoy, 2022). This pattern suggests that teenage fatherhood is not an isolated event but a consequence of overlapping socioeconomic, familial, and behavioral vulnerabilities, including disadvantage, unstable family structures, exposure to violence, substance use, and early sexual risk-taking (Lesser & Recto, 2021; Liu et al., 2025).

These vulnerabilities are reinforced by structural poverty and interrupted schooling, where boredom, parental conflict, and a diminished sense of purpose can draw adolescents into relationships that increase the likelihood of unplanned parenthood (Habito et al., 2021). Low household socioeconomic status, parental absence, single-parent households, large family size, and harsh disciplinary practices have also been linked to teenage fatherhood, indicating that early fatherhood often occurs in environments marked by limited support and constrained opportunities (Mekonen et al., 2024; Hor et al., 2022). Within the same context, parental reluctance to discuss sexuality or explain restrictions on pornographic materials may leave adolescents dependent on peers and media for sexual information, which can normalize risky behavior and reinforce misleading ideas about masculinity and sexual success (Bamishigbin Jr. et al., 2019; Gutierrez, 2021).

When these antecedent conditions culminate in fatherhood, teenage fathers often confront psychological distress, financial strain, and sudden caregiving responsibilities for which they feel unprepared (Bregabriel et al., 2021). Many sacrifice educational and career opportunities to meet parenting demands, and the resulting balancing of school, work, and family responsibilities can produce chronic stress, unemployment, and feelings of inadequacy (Batan et al., 2023; Mafora et al., 2025). Financial insecurity is especially pressing, pushing many into unstable, low-wage work and reinforcing cycles of poverty (Kong & Wei, 2023).

Although some teenage fathers cope through planning, resource-seeking, and practical adjustments to work and school, how they appraise stress and manage these demands remains insufficiently understood (Cinar et al., 2025). In this process, support from family members and social services can buffer depression and parenting stress, while adaptive coping may improve parenting efficacy and father-infant interaction quality (Albizzati, 2023; Ahun et al., 2024). Coping may also be shaped by spirituality, as Filipino Christian adolescents often turn to prayer for calm, relief, and hope. At the same time, youth in Mindanao draw meaning and resilience from their spiritual beliefs (Del Castillo et al., 2024). At the same time, unmarried teenage fatherhood may invite stigma, social exclusion, guilt, and self-blame, further complicating coping and weakening social identity (Matlakala & Rantho, 2021; Bogren et al., 2024).

Despite its importance, the literature on adolescent fathers remains limited, particularly in distinguishing antecedent events from later paternal experiences and in explaining how stressors, support systems, and structural barriers shape coping and outcomes (Cinar et al., 2025; Ferreira et al., 2024). Guided by the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which conceptualizes stress as a dynamic interplay of appraisal and environmental demands, this study aims to provide a contextually grounded understanding of teenage fatherhood in San Pablo City, Laguna. Specifically, it seeks to identify the antecedent events that lead to early fatherhood, explore the stressors experienced by teenage fathers, and describe the coping strategies they employ and the outcomes of these coping processes. Furthermore, this study gathers reflective insights on their personal growth and perceived support needs.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative, phenomenological design to systematically explore the lived experiences of teenage fathers in rural and urban areas of San Pablo City, Laguna. The phenomenological method was particularly appropriate, as it enables a rich, detailed understanding of the subjective meanings and interpretations that participants ascribe to their antecedent events, stressors, coping strategies, and outcomes. This design ensured methodological rigor and coherence in capturing the authentic voices of an understudied population, thereby addressing the research purpose comprehensively.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The participants comprised eight minors and four legal-age teenage fathers from selected barangays in San Pablo

City, Laguna, representing varied backgrounds in terms of educational attainment, employment status, monthly household income, and family structure. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that only individuals who met the inclusion criteria were included: (1) biological father aged 13–19 at the time of conception, and (2) at least one child aged one year or older. This approach ensured that all participants had direct, relevant experience of fatherhood.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a researcher-developed, structured interview guide comprising 24 open-ended items organized into five sections: background characteristics; antecedent events leading to teenage fatherhood; stressors and primary appraisals; secondary appraisals and coping strategies; outcomes; and reflection. The instrument underwent content validation by one language specialist and three experts in psychology. Content validation followed Lawshe's content validity. Initial CV scores and validator feedback identified items failing to meet the established threshold, prompting revisions or deletions to enhance relevance and clarity. Prior to the main administration, a trial interview was conducted with a teenage father from Buenavista, Quezon. Two researchers independently coded trial transcripts; inter-coder agreement was assessed, and any discrepancies were resolved through discussion. The trial interview ensured that ambiguities were identified early, allowing adjustments for clarity and cultural relevance in the Philippine context. These combined procedures secured the instrument's construct, making it methodologically reliable and fit for generating dependable, theory-informed findings for the study.

Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the study was secured from 40 barangay offices in San Pablo City, Laguna. Formal request letters were distributed to 40 barangay offices in San Pablo City, Laguna. Although barangay health centers do not maintain records of teenage fathers, Barangay Nutrition Scholars (BNS) reviewed teenage mothers' records to identify cases involving teenage fathers. Face-to-face interviews, each lasting approximately 30 minutes, were scheduled and conducted in designated rooms at barangay halls and/or health centers. Each participant engaged in rapport-building conversations to familiarize themselves with the process and promote open communication. Participation was entirely voluntary, and respondents were informed of their right to decline or withdraw at any time without penalty. Interviews were audio-recorded for accuracy. Data collection occurred from October 13 to 29, 2025.

Data Analysis Procedure

Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and synthesize the lived experiences of teenage fathers. Analysis followed a transparent, stepwise process: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts and field notes; (2) generation of initial codes across the dataset; (3) development and iterative refinement of a codebook; (4) clustering of codes into candidate themes; (5) review and refinement of themes against the data; and (6) synthesis into a comprehensive description of the phenomenon focused on antecedent events, stressors, coping strategies, and outcomes. An expert reviewed the coding schema, themes, and interpretations to assess the analysis. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, member checking was conducted by sharing summarized themes with selected participants for validation. Description and exemplar quotations were used in reporting to support transferability.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed in accordance with research guidelines and the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173). Prior to data collection, ethical procedures were carefully implemented, particularly for minor participants. For participants aged 18 and above, informed consent was obtained through signed consent forms distributed prior to data collection. For those under 18 years old, parental or guardian consent was obtained via signed consent forms after the study was explained in age-appropriate language and they were allowed to ask questions. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

To ensure participant welfare, the researchers monitored for signs of distress during data collection and were prepared to pause or terminate the interview as needed. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all responses were treated with strict confidentiality and anonymity. Data were securely stored in restricted-access files maintained by the researcher, and audio recordings were deleted after transcription. The researchers declared

no conflicts of interest and maintained transparency throughout the study. The principles of respect, voluntariness, confidentiality, and participant welfare were upheld at all times.

Results and Discussion

Socioecological Normalization of Teen Risk-Taking

One dominant theme that emerged from the interviews is the socioecological normalization of adolescent risk-taking among Filipino youth. Participants' accounts show how peer dynamics, family expectations, and community practices interact to produce permissive behavior, model early sexual initiation, and restrict access to protective measures. Cultural and institutional barriers, such as limited sexual health knowledge and poor access to contraceptives, further reduce awareness of risk and increase the likelihood of unplanned teenage parenthood.

Before learning of their impending fatherhood, participants described daily lives organized around peer routines that privileged immediate pleasure, social acceptance, and short-term choices over long-term planning. These everyday experiences often overshadowed future responsibilities and aspirations.

For example, one participant shared: *"I was working as a construction worker when I found out I was going to have a child. I was always with my friends; we would go around and hang out. Back then, I just wanted to finish my studies and become a pilot for the future."*

Another reflected: *"We just went out a lot, sometimes to the lake, sometimes to the court. When I was at home, I was just playing ML. All I wanted before was to get ahead in life, but I became a womanizer. I think I had more than five girlfriends, it depends; I can't even count them anymore."*

A participant noted: *"I was just hanging around, playing at the back, playing basketball. I got too lazy to study because I wanted to keep up with the gang."*

These narratives explain that participants' lives were organized around peer-centered routines that privileged immediate social rewards – belonging, status, leisure – and short-term gratifications, producing a pattern of goal displacement in which long-range aspirations (education, stable careers) were continually deferred. This displacement reflects more than youthful impulsivity; it arises from social norms, masculine identity scripts, and structural constraints (limited access to flexible schooling or decent work) that make present-oriented choices both rational and socially reinforced. Peer interactions functioned as powerful cues that reduced perceived threat and lowered the salience of future risks.

Peer-driven "gala" routines create a social ecology in which supervision is minimal, idle time is abundant, and opportunities for sexual encounters are frequent, so that curiosity and experimentation are enacted within permissive peer norms rather than arising solely from individual impulsivity (Gutierrez, 2021). This ecology is reinforced by economic pressures that push adolescents into early, often informal work such as construction, market vending, and event labor, where irregular hours, cash-based incomes, and adult-dominated sites reduce school attachment and increase exposure to older peers and sexualized contexts (Habito, 2021). Moreover, adolescents' perceptions of their peers' sexual behavior strongly predict their own sexual activity, which helps explain how gala routines and economic marginalization translate into earlier sexual initiation and elevated risk of unplanned transitions to parenthood. Thus, peer routines normalize short-term choices that interrupt schooling and limit access to protective institutions. Those interruptions, in turn, deepen reliance on peer networks that valorize the very behaviors that precipitate unplanned transitions to parenthood (Hor et al., 2022).

Consequently, several participants shared that family disruptions, including parental absence, migration, and conflict, frequently precipitated intense loneliness, prompting them to seek emotional support from peers through largely unstructured social activities. They described a clear shift from family-centered to peer-centered lives, where companionship with friends substituted for parental presence and supervision, and participation in group leisure and substance use became markers of belonging and social integration.

For instance, one shared: *"In my family, it's okay; we're a broken family. My parents aren't with me here in the Philippines. As for my friends, if we're not playing billiards, we'll be playing soccer and then drinking. I even include them in my business. Before, we probably only drank three days a week, but now it's more often, maybe two weeks in a month."*

Another reflected: *“My mother is the one who pays for my schooling; she works in Manila. My father is only in Calihan. I rarely go home because Papa is often not there. I have no one at home; I get bored. That’s why I stay at my friend’s house.”*

As further narrated by another participant: *“Maybe with him, I was the only one who made me feel like I had someone in my life, because I don’t often have Papa with me, and Mama is in Manila. We only met those people at school. They’re with me when we drink Golden and milk tea because we had a lot of friends back then.”*

These narratives show that when parental presence is limited, adolescents’ social worlds shift so that peers become the main source of emotional support, practical help, and identity formation, leading to a chain of psychosocial effects. With less family supervision, young men increasingly engage in unstructured group activities that provide a sense of belonging and status but also encourage risky behaviors such as substance use and casual sex. Everyday peer interactions, including drinking, joking, shared leisure, and cooperative hustles, act as micro-institutions that socialize young men into a masculinity model where risk-taking and sexual conquest are valued, which can normalize unprotected sex and reduce contraceptive use. When parents are absent or inconsistently present, peer groups often assume a guiding role, providing emotional support but promoting permissive norms rather than corrective guidance. This contrasts with situations where parental absence is addressed through increased monitoring or strict discipline, which can lead to oppositional behavior in adolescents.

Permissive peer environments reduce adolescents’ perception of behavioral risks through repeated normative messages, reputational rewards, and mutual reinforcement, making unprotected sex seem low-risk and socially beneficial (Bray et al., 2025). At the same time, intergenerational expectations and cultural fertility norms that downplay long-term consequences can further weaken deterrents, sometimes framing early parenthood as acceptable or even desirable (Liu et al., 2025). Where parent-child communication about sexuality is sparse or moralizing rather than informational, a critical protective influence is lost (Clark et al., 2024). Positive, open parent-child relationship quality consistently predicts lower adolescent risk-taking and buffers the effect of socioeconomic strain on behavior, which suggests that strengthening family communication is a high-leverage target (Chalfant et al., 2022).

Furthermore, several participants explained that religious teachings, family role models, and peer dynamics collectively normalized unprotected sex and early fatherhood among participants. Participants described faith-based opposition to contraception, intergenerational patterns of early childbearing, and peer cultures that valorized sexual activity. These social cues reduced perceived risk and framed teenage parenting as an expected life course event rather than an adverse outcome.

As one participant explained: *“Because we are Muslim. So, in our community, using contraceptives is not tolerated because, for us Muslims, the more the merrier. And on both sides of my parents, almost all of them are politicians in Mindanao. So, they prefer larger families because they are always thinking about politics.”*

Another participant reflected: *“My mother says I bring so many people to the house, all sorts of women. I really want to have someone with me. My friends are already young fathers, too. And my uncle, my mother’s brother, also had children early. There are really many here. We even reach as far as Alaminos. Those friends of mine are the ones I joke with about girlfriends. They brag about the women and about sex like that.”*

Also, a participant recounted: *“Maybe it’s because of my friends, because they’re reckless. Sex is always the topic among us, what they do. They say it’s better without protection. My friend said, ‘Just try it, it’s fun,’ so I went along. Then my grandmother scolded me at home. She said not to always have sex. It was also driven by lust. I thought you wouldn’t get someone pregnant the first time, so I didn’t think about the consequences.”*

These responses highlight how religious teachings that emphasize fertility, family role models who normalize early childbearing, and peer cultures that reward sexual bravado work together to frame unprotected sex as a normal, even desirable, life milestone. Faith-based values and examples from kin reduce perceived risks and moral barriers to contraception. At the same time, peers reinforce these cues through boasting, encouragement, and modeling, creating reputational incentives for unprotected sex. These influences discourage help-seeking for sexual health, limit contraceptive use, and channel young men toward paths where early fatherhood is expected rather than avoided.

Peer groups, family expectations, and religious norms interact as reinforcing social forces that shape adolescents' behaviors and life choices. Male-dominated, idle peer settings turn unprotected sex into a marker of status and normalize not using contraception through repeated modeling and encouragement (Maghupoy, 2022). At the same time, disrupted schooling and extended idleness limit perceived life opportunities, making early relationships and parenthood seem both achievable and socially valued (Habito et al., 2021).

When family members model early parenting and remain silent about contraception, the lack of protective parental guidance effectively signals approval of early fatherhood, reducing perceived risks and hastening the transition to becoming a father (Lesser & Recto, 2021). Intergenerational transmission of caregiving norms and early family experiences can shape later orientations to parenting and risk. For instance, adolescent experiences with involved fathers predict different adult reproductive strategies, meaning that disruptions in family attachment and modeling during adolescence can have downstream effects on sexual decision-making (Bechayda et al., 2022).

Moreover, several participants revealed how educational aspirations conflicted with impulsive behaviors or deliberate family plans, accelerating their transition to fatherhood. Many expressed regret about abandoning schooling, either because of impulsive decisions or because they intentionally chose early parenthood. These narratives consistently framed education as a goal that was displaced by immediate emotional drives or family-building motives.

As one indicated, *"Before, all I wanted was to finish my studies. I regret my decision because at my young age, I shouldn't have gone through that; it's stressful, and I feel like I'm going crazy when I overthink."*

Another participant shared: *"Back then, I really wanted to finish my studies. Maybe my impulsiveness then caused the change in my life. If I hadn't had a child, I might still be studying now and continuing college. At first, I regretted it, but now it's okay because it's already happened and I must take responsibility."*

A participant also narrated: *"I did that on purpose. I really wanted to build a family; it was my decision, even though my partner back then didn't know. She was only fourteen then."*

These narratives show how impulsive drives, deliberate family-building motives, and limited ecological opportunities create a pathway to early fatherhood that displaces educational trajectories. Immediate emotional rewards—intimacy, belonging, and the symbolic status of forming a family—are often valued more than long-term educational gains. This leads to concrete choices such as dropping out of school, not returning, or deliberately becoming a parent, which reshape how adolescents use their time, participate in work, and manage relationships, making it harder to continue schooling. Over time, assuming provider or partner roles reinforces a paternal identity, encouraging continued involvement in caregiving and income generation while making a return to formal education more difficult.

Peer-driven school disruption, family role models, and structural disadvantages combine to shape young men's life choices, making early parenthood both socially understandable and practically rational. Risk-taking and displays of bravado coexist with genuine desires for intimacy and family formation (Aho & Peltola, 2022). When peer norms celebrate sexual conquest, and family members model early parenting (Augustyn et al., 2025), leaving school seems less costly and forming a family more rewarding, positioning reproduction as a feasible alternative to interrupted educational paths (Bae et al., 2023). Poverty, limited access to youth-friendly reproductive services, and religious opposition to contraception further constrain options for delaying parenthood, so simply providing access is not enough to overcome strong social and cultural pressures.

Socioecological normalization of teen risk-taking creates clear antecedent pathways to teenage fatherhood by embedding permissive behaviors within peer dynamics, family disruptions, and cultural norms that downplay risks and prioritize immediate social rewards. Peer-centered "gala" routines foster idle time, minimal supervision, and frequent sexual opportunities, where boasting and encouragement normalize unprotected sex as low-threat status markers, displacing aspirations like education amid economic pressures. Family disruptions such as parental migration, broken homes, and absent oversight, shift reliance to peers for belonging, amplifying substance use and casual encounters that model early parenting through narratives of loneliness-driven drinking or friend stays. Cultural and religious influences entrench this by valorizing fertility, with intergenerational early

childbearing models and contraceptive silence signaling approval, systematically reducing risk barriers.

These insights underscore the necessity for policymakers to prioritize comprehensive sex education emphasizing male reproductive responsibilities, thereby addressing the insufficient understanding that perpetuates unintended pregnancies and long-term mental health risks. Integrating comprehensive sex education into schools and homes equips youth with the knowledge to critically evaluate risky peer influences and identify potential dangers. Communities can foster enhanced supervision and open family dialogues. These strategies empower young people to make informed short-term decisions that safeguard their long-term well-being.

Economic Precarity and Provider Role Strain

Limited financial resources, unstable employment, and restricted access to social supports produced persistent material insecurity that undermined teenage fathers' ability to provide for basic family needs. Participants described chronic economic strain that generated role conflict and psychological burden, forcing them to prioritize immediate survival over longer-term investments in education and caregiving.

Several participants reported profound financial hardship, emotional distress, and familial conflict following early fatherhood. These disruptions curtailed personal aspirations and altered daily life routines. The data show recurring patterns of anxiety about basic needs, coerced and monotonous work, and strained intergenerational relationships, all of which illustrate the multifaceted pressures of teenage parenthood.

As one participant shared: *"With money, I don't know where I'll get the money to buy supplies and rice. My child was born early. I can no longer do the things I want. Sometimes I even hear whispers, and it makes me feel angry."*

Another participant narrated: *"At work, sis. I was really forced to work then, even though I didn't want to. I had so many jobs: a vendor in town, in the inner area, and then construction. I was really stressed at work; now I'm just doing the same thing again. Back then, I felt like I didn't want to live anymore. He insisted, so I just agreed. He would say, 'you're already here anyway,' but when I have no money, I'm told I'm worthless."*

Also, a participant described: *"What I also worry about is how I can provide for my child because I don't have a job right now; the two of us are still studying. My mother and I don't really understand each other either; like, whenever she's angry with me, she kind of forces me to provide for the child even though I can't work yet. I even thought to just leave because I myself no longer know what to do."*

These narratives show that early fatherhood creates significant material, emotional, and relational challenges that reshape adolescents' lives. Daily struggles to provide basic needs like food and medical care cause chronic stress, interfere with schooling and future planning, and push young men into physically demanding, low-status work. Expectations from families add pressure, often leading to criticism, conflict, and social stigma, which undermine self-esteem and increase anxiety or depressive symptoms. These stressors drive short-term survival strategies, while limited family and community support reinforce isolation and reduce help-seeking.

Financial strain and childcare responsibilities create multiple challenges, as limited resources interact with family expectations and local labor conditions to influence coping and long-term outcomes. Unstable income and heavy caregiving demands, combined with maternal pressure, intergenerational conflict, and expectations to perform repetitive, low-status work, contribute to feelings of threat, shame, and failure, often leading teenage fathers to withdraw (Kukano & Nyirenda, 2025).

The concept of transdisciplinary stress explains how objective challenges, such as low income, unstable work, and limited childcare, interact with the subjective feeling that demands exceed one's control. This concept shows how teenage fathers' perception of these stressors influences whether they respond with problem-focused engagement or avoidant survival strategies (Bregabriel et al., 2022). Stigma and harsh family reactions limit perceived options, reduce self-efficacy, and make short-term coping like accepting demeaning work or leaving school appear rational despite long-term consequences. In contrast, supportive family involvement and shifts in local expectations help preserve agency and promote adaptive coping (Krueger, 2024).

Furthermore, several participants reported reduced free time, increased work demands, and limited social interactions, resulting in a pervasive sense of loss and resignation. These changes were not temporary

inconveniences but enduring reorganizations of time and priorities, where responsibilities such as business ventures and childcare became central and often nonnegotiable.

As one participant explained: *“As I said, everything really got divided. Before, after school, that was all my free time, but now it’s split because I also work. Now my free time is most likely only at night. But of course, at night I also need to rest because tomorrow the routine is the same. Only when I have a lot of free time can I go out.”*

As further narrated by another participant: *“It’s a big change, sis. Before, I would wake up and go to school. Now I go to work. Before I would go out and play. Now, nothing. I feel like I can’t do that anymore. I can’t change it now.”*

Another participant reflected: *“Well, I avoid my friends; I’m all work now. Not like before, we were always together, now it’s rare. At night, I take care of my child even though I’m tired because I work in the morning. I have no rest day; I have to work hard. I also think it’s a shame about the money I could earn.”*

Fatherhood forces young men to reorganize their time and social lives, turning free afternoons into late nights spent on sleep and rest, which leads to chronic fatigue and fewer opportunities for peer interaction and skill-building. Balancing roles as a student, worker, and caregiver creates conflict, undermines self-confidence, and shifts focus toward immediate survival rather than long-term goals such as education. Social isolation and shrinking support networks remove key sources of relief, while unstable, low-paid work and limited childcare make routines feel fixed, reducing perceived control and encouraging resignation and avoidant coping.

Financial scarcity and provider expectations restructure daily life, identity, and future orientation, compelling teenage fathers to reallocate time from education and social development to income generation and caregiving, which produces persistent role conflict and cumulative fatigue. When part-time work is structured and compatible with schooling, fathers negotiate flexible hours, launch microenterprises, or leverage kin networks to meet immediate needs while preserving educational trajectories and social ties (Buquid et al., 2024).

Work that demands fixed, long hours undermines school attendance, erodes peer support, and accelerates social withdrawal, even when the father is actively trying to provide. Those who interpret new responsibilities as a challenge often experience increased motivation, role consolidation, and skill acquisition, whereas those who appraise them as a threat encounter shame, helplessness, and emotion-focused coping that prioritizes short-term survival over long-term investment (Kukano & Nyirenda, 2025). Strong family backing, community acceptance, and policies that permit flexible schooling shift appraisals toward challenge by expanding perceived options and reinforcing self-efficacy. Absent these buffers, the same economic pressures are more likely to be internalized as personal failure, narrowing perceived agency and increasing reliance on demeaning or precarious work (Corotan, 2025).

Several participants also described persistent financial dependence on family members, limited opportunities to generate personal income due to environmental constraints, and ongoing tensions arising from resource scarcity in supporting their child. This theme underscores the socio-economic pressures faced by teenage fathers, often leading to frugal habits, intra-family conflicts, and a sense of burden.

For instance, one participant explained: *“My brother is the one giving us money now, even for the child’s needs. I sometimes don’t spend my school allowance, so I can save. Even if I want to buy other things I like, I can’t.”*

Another participant shared: *“I don’t have a job. I can’t push a trolley all day because it’s very hot.”*

A participant also narrated: *“Sometimes my husband and I even fight because we have nothing to buy. I get annoyed sometimes because it feels like I’m the only one always finding a way. I save for the baby – those are the coins – and when there’s extra, I drop them into the piggy bank.”*

These responses reveal how persistent financial dependence and environmental barriers do more than limit material resources. Relying on siblings or parents for basic child needs creates ongoing debt and role reversals that undermine autonomy and self-worth, while harsh conditions such as extreme heat or limited access to safe work restrict income opportunities, pushing teenage fathers toward precarious, intermittent jobs or unemployment. To cope, they adopt micro-strategies like extreme frugality, hoarding small savings, and forgoing

personal needs, which maintain child support but highlight limited agency and chronic scarcity. Frequent household conflicts over shortages add relational strain, reinforcing feelings of burden and helplessness.

Financial pressures are a dominant theme limiting fathers' involvement in pregnancy and childbirth, alongside men's alienation from health services and traditional gender norms that discourage supportive roles. Nonetheless, many fathers expressed motivation to be involved despite stigma and exclusion (Bogren et al., 2024). Moreover, unemployment, loss of autonomy, and emotional stress create feelings of threat that, when support is limited, can lead teenage fathers to cope through substance use, avoidance, or leaving school (Mafora et al., 2025). Those who see fatherhood as a manageable challenge often engage in problem-focused strategies such as seeking work or actively caring for their child, which helps build a paternal identity and improve life trajectories (Hussaini et al., 2023). In contrast, fathers who internalize stigma, especially through moralizing religious views that frame early fatherhood as failure, are more likely to withdraw and abandon long-term goals.

Additionally, several participants described profound emotional distress, financial instability, and social stigmatization as central challenges in their experiences as teenage fathers. These struggles often led to feelings of isolation, anger, and withdrawal, exacerbated by unemployment and reliance on informal support networks. Moreover, peer ridicule intensified their psychological burden, prompting maladaptive coping strategies such as debt accumulation and disengagement from social interactions.

As one participant narrated: *"I don't have a job right now. Whatever I use to buy things is just what my brother gives me. I feel sorry for myself and my child. At school, if they find out I have a child, they tease me for being a young father; they put me down. It hurts me; sometimes it makes me angry. Sometimes it takes away my motivation. I just let them be."*

Another participant shared: *"When I have absolutely nowhere to get money. I really don't know what to do. So, I end up getting money from others. I also borrow. What people said really made me angry then. I felt like I wanted to confront them. I really can't sleep when I have so many problems on my mind. I stay up late and become very sad, especially at night. I stopped caring about others. I just want to sit and do nothing. Just my phone. I only think about myself."*

Additionally, a participant described: *"I don't have a job. When Mommy hasn't sent money because she hasn't been paid yet, I find ways to get by. I go with my brother to deliver videoke machines. ...I hear insults. I just let it go because I might punch them otherwise, as long as they're not helping me."*

These responses show that chronic financial strain reshapes identity and social status. Relying on family or informal loans can become a visible sign of failure, leading to peer ridicule and internalized shame, which heightens emotional distress (insomnia, sadness, irritability) and reduces perceived coping options. Teenage fathers often feel overwhelmed and respond with avoidant or impulsive strategies such as withdrawal, taking on debt, or risky short-term work that ease immediate pressure but increase long-term vulnerability. Sleep loss, poor concentration, and rumination harm school and work performance, while family expectations and peer taunting limit help-seeking and turn practical challenges into moralized failures, deepening isolation and anger.

Teenage fathers experience stress in four main areas: vocational and educational concerns, worries about maternal and infant health, anxieties about future parenthood, and relationship problems. The intensity of these stressors changes across pregnancy and after birth, with those who anticipated the pregnancy reporting lower stress in the third trimester than those who did not (Elster & Panzarine, 2018). This pattern reflects the stress process, in which financial instability or social stigma can trigger immediate emotional distress and lead to strains such as disengagement from school or withdrawal from relationships (Dzirasa et al., 2019). Becoming a father can act as a "sentinel event", encouraging young men to reduce risky behaviors. However, a lack of resources often makes coping difficult without support. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, some Filipino teenage fathers managed educational disruptions by using flexible schedules and staying committed to their studies (Cruz et al., 2024). This shows that anticipating a pregnancy and framing the experience positively can help reduce stress, even in resource-limited settings.

Economic precarity and provider role strain emerge as primary stressors for teenage fathers, appraised through the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping as overwhelming threats that exceed limited resources, manifesting in chronic financial insecurity, unstable, low-status work, and disrupted routines that prioritize survival over education and caregiving. Participants' narratives reveal primary appraisals of harm from material shortages, like

inability to afford rice, diapers, or basics, compounded by family conflicts, peer stigma, and intergenerational criticism, evoking anger, shame, sleeplessness, and helplessness as demands outstrip coping capacities such as unemployment, heat-barred labor, or sibling dependence.

Secondary appraisals underscore constrained options amid absent supports, inflexible jobs, time reorganization (e.g., free afternoons to exhausted nights), and relational strains, framing fatherhood as an uncontrollable burden that fosters resignation, isolation, and emotional distress rather than challenge. These appraisals align with the model's emphasis on person-environment transactions, where objective hardships (precarity, ridicule) interact with subjective perceptions of inadequacy, amplifying psychological burden and curtailing adaptive responses in resource-scarce Philippine contexts.

Family-focused efforts, such as mediation, parenting education, and open communication, rebuild support networks, reduce shame, and alleviate the primary stressors faced by teenage fathers. These stressors exacerbate anxiety, depression, and diminished self-worth among teenage fathers, often culminating in persistent financial hardships and compromised mental health. Community-level dynamics are equally critical. Stigma-reduction initiatives and peer support networks restore social connections, normalize help-seeking behaviors, and safeguard against social isolation and exclusion. Ultimately, this fosters resilience and sustains family cohesion.

Resilience Through Relational and Economic Resourcefulness

Insights from the interviews underscore that resilience among teenage fathers is cultivated through active resourcefulness, which includes both economic strategies and relational support. Participants consistently reframed the hardships of early fatherhood not as barriers, but as sources of motivation to adapt and persevere. This adaptive process was marked by the deliberate pursuit of income-generating activities and the strategic reliance on support networks, all driven by a redefined sense of responsibility toward their child.

Several participants highlighted their efforts to create alternative livelihoods and to prioritize familial needs, demonstrating a shift from a personal to a paternal focus.

One participant shared: *"When Ate can't give, I really hustle outside... My friends, when they know of a source, they take me along. I was out of work for a long time because there isn't work every day... My boss told me to buy alcohol; he didn't know I pocketed the change, just to buy my child's diapers."*

Another participant emphasized: *"Just be resourceful and then work... I really looked for someone to borrow from so we could buy medicine and pay the hospital... I found a way because no one else would help."*

One participant described: *"I face the challenges of being a young father by providing for my family's needs... I keep striving for them... I help my mother with her vegetable garden and selling at the market, and I also do sideline work in construction."*

These narratives show that teenage fathers use practical ingenuity as a coping strategy, turning scarcity into actionable solutions. They approach threats to family well-being as solvable problems, which reduces helplessness and directs anxiety into purposeful action. This leads to problem-focused behaviors that meet immediate household needs and protect caregiving time. By involving kin, friends, and employers, fathers share the burden, legitimize help-seeking, and maintain reciprocal support over time. Repeatedly practicing these strategies strengthens their identity as active providers, enhancing paternal agency and future focus even when formal opportunities are limited. However, reliance on informal credit and precarious work can increase economic vulnerability, generate psychosocial burdens like shame and indebtedness, and expose fathers to exploitation, so short-term stability often comes at the cost of long-term security.

Extended Filipino kinship networks function as dynamic systems of resource pooling, skill-sharing, and emotional regulation that directly shape teenage fathers' capacity to parent under strain (Bernabe & Marasigan, 2022). Through regular remittances, shared childcare shifts, informal labor exchanges, and the transmission of practical knowledge (e.g., budgeting, infant care, job-seeking), family members reduce immediate economic pressure and free time for caregiving, which in turn preserves fathers' psychological bandwidth for sustained involvement. This support network helps maintain teenage fathers' involvement by providing reliable, low-conflict ways to seek help and negotiate responsibilities, allowing caregiving duties to be shared without harming family

relationships or the father's sense of control (Hilverda et al., 2025). When combined with active problem-solving, such as finding casual work, reorganizing household tasks, or using available services, kinship support boosts parenting effectiveness, speeds role adjustment, and helps fathers remain consistently present despite limited resources (Albizzati et al., 2023).

Consequently, several participants reported encountering pressing challenges during early fatherhood that not only tested their resilience but also shaped their coping strategies and sense of responsibility. These demanding experiences enabled them to develop stronger problem-solving skills, greater emotional endurance, and a renewed paternal identity.

As one participant shared: *"When I got sick, I didn't know where to get money... Sometimes I borrowed and then couldn't pay back because there was nothing to pay with... My brother told me to just study well so I could get a job... He was the one who helped me go back to school."*

One participant narrated: *"Before, when she was about to give birth, I didn't know where to get the money to pay for the hospital. Luckily, my cousin helped us... he handled the paperwork... we ended up with a zero bill."*

Another account reflected: *"When my child was confined because he got pneumonia... I really looked for someone to borrow from so we could buy medicine and pay the hospital... I even wanted to beg."*

These responses show that crises in early fatherhood prompt rapid problem-solving that shapes both behavior and identity. When urgent needs like a child's illness or medical bills arise, teenage fathers quickly turn to borrowing, seeking kin support, navigating paperwork, and taking precarious work to meet immediate demands and maintain caregiving. While these actions temporarily restore stability and build practical skills, emotional resilience, and a stronger paternal identity, they also create social obligations and reliance on fragile networks, which can increase stress and limit future options. Kin support facilitates help-seeking and shared responsibility but can also produce shame or reduce autonomy, and short-term solutions like informal debt often leave fathers exposed to ongoing vulnerability.

Access to vocational opportunities can help teenage fathers maintain school engagement and confidence (Cuevas, 2024), but the findings show this stability is often fragile, repeatedly disrupted by persistent economic hardship. Solving immediate problems – like paying a bill or finding temporary work – relieves stress only briefly and does not address the underlying scarcity that drives ongoing resource concerns. Participants said they had nowhere to get money, which shows they mostly depend on their families to solve problems instead of using banks, government programs, or other outside resources (Astuti et al., 2021). Family support serves as a vital buffer, helping teenage fathers manage daily caregiving and relieve immediate stress. However, it also creates cycles of reciprocal obligations, such as informal loans, labor exchanges, and emotional debts that can accumulate and become unsustainable, leading to long-term psychosocial costs (Ahun et al., 2024).

Several participants also emphasized that prayer and devotional practices were vital sources of strength and hope. These practices helped them regulate emotions such as anger and reframe negative thought patterns, thereby fostering renewed optimism and a clearer sense of purpose in life.

As one participant reflected: *"I just leave my problems to God, especially when I have nothing left. My teacher told us that if they can do it, I can too. She said to be brave and to study hard."*

A participant shared: *"I pray, and I also go to church. God is truly the one who helps me get through my problems, especially during the times when I didn't want to live anymore. My family and God are the ones who really help me."*

Another participant indicated: *"I pray so I can say out the hurt inside me; it lessens the weight I feel. I always tell myself not to give up, even when it's extremely hard."*

These narratives show that prayer and faith help teenage fathers manage stress by promoting calm, emotional regulation, and perspective. Religious beliefs also give meaning to hardship, thereby sustaining motivation and reducing hopelessness. Family, teachers, and church communities translate these beliefs into practical support such as financial help, childcare, assistance with paperwork, encouragement, and social validation, which

strengthens self-confidence and supports future goals. When these reappraisals are reinforced socially, they encourage active problem-solving behaviors like finding work, returning to school, or accessing services. This combination of personal coping and interpersonal support helps young men build a sense of identity as capable fathers and sustain caregiving.

Teenage fathers maintain perseverance by combining spiritual practices with social support. Prayer and faith-based rituals help regulate emotions and reduce stress, while prayer promotes calmness, emotional relief, and hopeful reinterpretation of stressful situations (Del Castillo et al., 2023). At the same time, encouragement from teachers, family, and peers provides validation that strengthens confidence, supports future planning, and turns reinterpreted meaning into practical steps (Mukuna, 2020). Reframing hardship as a test, source of purpose, or opportunity for growth helps fathers view challenges as manageable, reducing avoidance and promoting active caregiving. These spiritually guided strategies do more than calm emotions. They help young men build a sense of themselves as capable fathers, motivate practical actions like finding work, attending school, and caring for their children, and create reciprocal social obligations that both support and limit coping (Canteras et al., 2021).

Moreover, several participants reflected on seeking or receiving assistance from formal organizations. Their narratives highlighted both the availability and the limitations of institutional support.

As one participant indicated, *"PhilHealth helped us. My father walked there; he sped up the requirements, and we were able to leave right away."*

Another participant shared: *"The 4Ps and PhilHealth helped when she gave birth; what we had to pay was reduced. At the Barangay, they also give aid, rice, and sardines."*

Also, a participant described: *"Yes, I received help. My Grade 10 teacher, who is my child's godmother, is close to me and continues to help. They also provide free vaccinations and vitamins for the baby."*

These narratives show that access to institutions like PhilHealth, 4Ps, and barangay aid, combined with support from teachers, family, and church networks, helps reduce the immediate costs of caregiving and makes stress more manageable for teenage fathers. By helping with medical bills, providing food and necessities, and handling paperwork, this support gives teenage fathers more time and energy for caregiving and school. Trusted individuals translate these benefits into practical assistance and encouragement, such as helping with paperwork, arranging vaccinations, or providing childcare. These resources increase perceived support, reduce stress, and make problem-focused coping, such as finding work, returning to school, or negotiating household roles, more feasible. However, access has limits. Conditionality, irregular disbursements, complex procedures, stigma, and inadequate benefits can make support fragile, forcing families to rely on informal borrowing and placing additional strain on already burdened kin networks.

Community social capital supports teenage fathers through reliable, low-effort resources such as PhilHealth coverage, conditional cash transfers like 4Ps, and barangay aid, which reduce financial strain, lower the costs of caregiving, and free time and energy for ongoing father involvement (Bustos, 2023). Complementing these formal supports, locally driven resource mobilization, including flexible informal labor and support from social networks, provides practical and economic assistance that helps teenage fathers remain engaged in parenting despite unstable employment (Makusha, 2024). The effectiveness of these coping strategies depends on consistent access to institutional support. When services are reliable, fathers can invest in long-term goals such as education, steady employment, and regular caregiving. When access is irregular, coping becomes fragile, generates informal debts, and shifts burdens onto family networks, reinforcing vulnerability (Borman et al., 2025).

Resilience through relational and economic resourcefulness among teenage fathers manifests as problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies within the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, in which participants reappraise economic precarity and provider strain as manageable challenges by actively mobilizing resources to restore balance. Primary appraisals of threats like medical bills, unemployment, or childcare demands trigger secondary appraisals of viable coping options, leading to problem-focused efforts such as *"madiskarte"* ingenuity creative income generation (e.g., cutting work change for diapers, kin-assisted vending, construction sideline) and leveraging extended Filipino kinship networks for remittances, childcare shifts, and paperwork navigation, which reduce immediate burdens and sustain paternal involvement. Emotion-focused strategies, including prayer, faith-

based reframing, and encouragement from teachers or family, regulate distress, foster optimism, and reinforce self-efficacy, transforming helplessness into perseverance and purpose. Institutional supports like PhilHealth, 4Ps cash transfers, and barangay aid further enhance coping efficacy by alleviating material shortages, though their irregularity can strain informal networks.

Together, these findings indicate that the resilience of teenage fathers depends not only on individual resourcefulness and relational networks but also on the broader informational, social, and structural contexts surrounding early fatherhood. Limitations in sexual knowledge, limited coping resources, and exposure to stigma and social marginalization appear to exacerbate psychological stress and constrain effective parenting, underscoring the influence of familial, community, and societal environments on both paternal engagement and child well-being.

Transformative Fatherhood: Sacrifice, Reprioritization, and Persistent Vulnerability

Another theme that emerged from the interviews was transformative fatherhood characterized by sacrifice, reprioritization, and persistent vulnerability. Participants consistently narrated fatherhood as a pivotal turning point that reshaped their identities, values, and daily routines. While becoming a father instilled responsibility, discipline, and future orientation, it also exposed them to enduring financial insecurity, emotional strain, and role overload. Rather than resolving existing life difficulties, fatherhood initiated a continuous process of adjustment that required sustained effort, resilience, and coping across multiple life domains.

Several participants shared that fatherhood compelled them to reorient their long-term goals, particularly by returning to education to improve their lives and secure stability.

One participant narrated: *“I will continue my studies because I stopped for four years when I had a child. I will be in Grade Seven and then continue in ALS. I was forced to stop studying, but I am continuing now. That’s the only way I know. It has changed me for the better. The problems are being resolved.”*

Another participant shared: *“If I didn’t have a job at that time, I might have gone crazy, and I wouldn’t have known where to get the money to pay. When I had a child, I stopped hanging out all the time. Only sometimes now because I work. I really prioritize our food for the whole day – making sure we eat three times a day – and the baby’s needs. I also can’t drink anymore because my husband forbade me.”*

Also, another participant described: *“I really just need to work so there is money. When there is no event, that’s my only enemy because I won’t earn any money. I really think about where I can get money when that happens, so there will be funds for expenses...”*

These narratives show that teenage fatherhood often reshapes life priorities, making education and work complementary rather than competing. Many teenage fathers view schooling as a long-term investment, returning to programs like ALS to rebuild their trajectory and improve economic stability, while steady, even if precarious, work provides immediate income, routine, and a sense of contribution that supports emotional well-being and affirms their paternal identity. Work enables access to schooling by covering fees, supplies, and childcare, while education restores future focus and confidence, easing the stress of current scarcity. Support from family, flexible teachers, and peer job networks helps turn intentions into action.

Conception and early fatherhood create immediate time pressures and role conflicts, as young men must juggle caregiving, earning income, and continuing education, often leading to delayed progression or school dropout. These pressures are intensified by economic hardship and social stigma, which undermine motivation and limit access to supportive resources like flexible schooling, childcare, or mentorship (Berthelon et al., 2025). Inflexible school schedules, strict attendance policies, and labor markets dominated by low-paid, unstable work turn what might be temporary disruptions into lasting deficits in human capital, reducing future employment opportunities (Chakraborty & Villa, 2024). The psychological toll of stress, fatigue, and perceived failure interacts with structural barriers, making it even more difficult for teenage fathers to reengage with education or career pathways, highlighting the need for targeted interventions that address both material and institutional obstacles.

Furthermore, several participants further described how fatherhood demanded sustained sacrifice of personal time, desires, and former lifestyles.

One participant explained: *"I reduced my free time for myself, my time with friends, and the time for hobbies I wanted to do; I really prioritized my family. I also sacrifice the things I want to do. For example, if I had something scheduled that day and it turned out I couldn't push through because something more important came up, like when my wife got sick or something needed to be bought."*

Another participant shared: *"Sometimes I really don't know where to get money. My sideline work isn't every day. The change is big. I no longer spend on meaningless things. I have to save. I can't do those things anymore; before, I just wanted to play. I used to think I shouldn't be like this if I hadn't had a child early. Because when the baby really runs out of milk, there's nowhere to get it. I really can't be calm; I get money outside, I find ways. I even pocket the change when there's nothing left."*

Also, another participant stated, *"My life really changed; it was really bad before. What pushed me to change was when my wife got pregnant, and our child came out – that's when I changed. Before, I would vape almost every day when I was troubled, but now I need to be strong and work hard for my child and my job."*

These narratives show that the sacrifices teenage fathers make are not short-term trade-offs but a lasting reorganization of daily routines, self-identity, and social connections, affecting both immediate behavior and long-term trajectories. Regularly sacrificing hobbies, peer interactions, and personal comforts to meet family responsibilities creates chronic fatigue, fewer opportunities for skill development, and a shrinking social network, which erode confidence and future planning even as they demonstrate commitment to fatherhood. Fathers constantly assess their ability to handle competing demands, using emotion-focused strategies, such as limiting leisure or controlling impulses, to manage stress and maintain their role, alongside problem-focused actions, such as earning income or reducing spending, to address external pressures. In this way, caregiving is both meaningful and a continual source of stress.

This describes a self-reinforcing cycle in which repeated financial strain and caregiving demands lead teenage fathers to continually sacrifice their personal needs. Dependence on others and lost leisure time cause chronic sleep loss, rumination, and irritability, which reduce focus, motivation, and willingness to seek help. At the same time, peer ridicule and family tension turn practical shortages into moralized failures, increasing shame and withdrawal. This drives reliance on short-term coping strategies, such as borrowing or precarious informal work, which further destabilize finances and relationships (Albizzati et al., 2023). Financial strain compels teenage fathers to rely on short-term coping strategies, such as informal work, precarious employment, or borrowing, which further destabilize finances and family relationships (Mekonen et al., 2024). The early postnatal period intensifies these challenges, as concentrated caregiving demands and heightened emotional strain turn practical sacrifices into ongoing emotional exhaustion and increase the risk of anxiety and depression (FitzGerald et al., 2022).

Additionally, several participants reported a noticeable reduction in stress due to assistance from peers and friends, particularly in childcare.

One participant explained: *"My stress has decreased a lot because I have someone helping me. Sometimes my friends join me in caring for the baby. And I don't really have much to do because I don't have a job."*

Another participant shared: *"Whenever I'm stressed, I really need to open up to my mother. When I do, she really helps me change my decisions. My stress really comes from what I hear people say."*

Also, another participant stated: *"Whenever I put my faith in God, it helps me become calm and think clearly about how to meet the baby's needs. I'm not yet ready to face the responsibility because I haven't accepted it, but now I have just accepted it because it's necessary. I pray so I can say the hurt inside me; it makes me feel better and lessens the weight I feel."*

Participants' narratives show that peer support, maternal guidance, and prayer reduce stress through complementary pathways. Friends who help with childcare provide immediate relief, model caregiving, and maintain social connections. Mothers and other family members offer material support, advice, and guidance on decision-making, expanding options and easing the sense of sole responsibility. Spiritual practices help fathers manage emotions, reframe hardship within a moral or providential framework, and regain calm for problem-

solving. These resources increase perceived control, social support, and confidence, shifting stress from overwhelming threat to manageable challenge.

When peers or friends share childcare duties, they restore temporal capacity for work, study, or rest, reduce acute fatigue, and prevent the cascade of missed opportunities that follows a single crisis. This practical buffering also preserves social belonging and models caregiving norms, thereby reducing stigma and normalizing help-seeking (Calzada et al., 2020). Prayer and faith provide cognitive reframing and purpose that attenuate negative affect, sustain hope, and support positive reappraisal, while confiding in trusted family members or peers externalizes the burden, clarifies choices, and mobilizes concrete resources, together lowering parenting stress and improving decision-making under pressure (Calero et al., 2020). Practical help reduces immediate load, which makes spiritual coping more effective because calmer cognition supports reappraisal. Conversely, faith-based optimism increases the likelihood that fathers will accept and reciprocate help, strengthening social ties (Cruz et al., 2024).

Moreover, several participants also described a structured yet demanding daily schedule that involved alternating between childcare, schooling, and informal work.

One participant narrated: *"In the morning, I watch my child. In the afternoon, I study. We only have classes for three days, so when I don't have class, that's when I push a trolley. I'm having a hard time now because of the modules; I can't write. At the same time, my cellphone got crushed – I dropped it in water."*

Another participant shared: *"When I don't have work, I spend the whole day caring for my child. I clean, and I also bathe him."*

Also, another participant stated: *"I work in the morning, and at night I do my duties as a father: caring for and putting my child to sleep."*

These responses highlight how fatherhood is a transformative process, enacted through continuous, full-day responsibilities that demand endurance and flexibility. Fathers' presence and active caregiving become central expressions of their role, even in the face of economic constraints—the active performance of caregiving and providing addresses immediate needs as a problem-focused action. At a deeper level, it also acts as a meaning-focused mechanism, reinforcing their transformed paternal identity and perseverance. By engaging in these demanding routines, fathers interpret their efforts as acts of sacrificial reprioritization. In doing so, the very enactment of daily responsibilities strengthens their sense of fatherhood, creating a continuous cycle of assessing challenges and coping through active involvement. This process embeds resilience within their evolving identity as fathers.

Teenage fathers are reported to experience elevated depressive symptoms, particularly when confronted with overlapping stressors such as educational disruption, financial pressure, and parenting responsibilities (Matlakala & Rantho, 2021). Conversely, Filipino adolescent fathers who perceive challenges as manageable and receive guidance from family or mentors are better able to navigate early fatherhood, demonstrating higher engagement in childcare and more adaptive coping strategies (Cinar et al., 2025). Furthermore, psychological availability and active father presence contribute to emotional stability and resilience, echoing participants' accounts in which daily caregiving involvement served as a central, identity-shaping expression of fatherhood—even in the context of limited economic opportunities (Kong & Wei, 2023).

Teenage fathers' impressive coping capacity reflects not just their psychological survival within constraints, but also how they actively negotiate caregiving and provider responsibilities while maintaining well-being. Their daily practices of sacrifice, reprioritization, and persistent engagement illustrate how fatherhood drives identity transformation, shapes routines, and reinforces self-efficacy, even amid economic, educational, and social challenges. This highlights that early fatherhood is a dynamic process in which personal resilience and adaptive strategies are central to sustaining both paternal involvement and family stability.

Together, these findings show that transformative fatherhood constitutes a complex developmental transition rather than a simple assumption of responsibility. Although participants actively reconstructed their identities through consistent caregiving involvement, intensified work participation, and renewed educational engagement, these adaptive efforts were negotiated within contexts of economic precarity, inflexible academic structures, and

persistent social stigma, which collectively perpetuated role overload and psychological strain. Consequently, the trajectory of transformative fatherhood is not determined by individual motivation alone but is significantly mediated by the responsiveness of educational institutions, labor conditions, familial networks, and community systems in mitigating vulnerability and sustaining paternal engagement and long-term stability.

Conclusion

The study finds that teenage fatherhood in San Pablo City is not an isolated phenomenon but the product of intersecting social and environmental influences—peer pressure, familial patterns of early parenthood, and cultural or religious norms that discourage contraception—which together normalize unprotected sex and shape young men’s risk perceptions. When fatherhood occurs, many adolescents confront acute challenges, including financial hardship, pressure to provide, curtailed educational opportunities, and precarious employment, producing emotional stress, role conflict, and a difficult negotiation between personal aspirations and new responsibilities. Despite these constraints, numerous young fathers display resilience and a pragmatic commitment to caregiving, relying on family and close social networks while adopting coping strategies such as informal work, small income-generating activities, and personal sacrifice to meet their children’s needs. Over time, many describe a reorientation from peer-centered lifestyles toward greater responsibility and care, reflecting the emergence of more family-oriented masculinities. However, persistent poverty and limited structural opportunities continue to undermine their prospects for long-term stability.

This study underscores the critical role of family and community support in facilitating teenage fathers' adaptation to the challenges of early parenthood, while revealing deficiencies in male reproductive knowledge that precipitate unintended pregnancies and long-term mental health vulnerabilities. Societal stigma and discouragement intensify familial rejection, compromise child-rearing environments, and discourage help-seeking behaviors. Policy implications advocate integrating comprehensive sex education—emphasizing male responsibilities—in both formal school curricula and community programs targeting out-of-school youth. Complementing this, community practices should foster culturally sensitive peer networks and mentorship to alleviate isolation, counteract tambay culture, and interrupt maladaptive habits such as substance use and idleness. Finally, educational and community reforms require equipping educators and leaders with gender-specific reproductive health training to dismantle stigma and promote psychosocial resilience.

Contributions of Authors

Authors 1, 2, and 3: conceptualization, proposal writing, data gathering, data analysis, manuscript preparation
Authors 4 and 5: supervision, academic guidance, manuscript review, editing, and revisions

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