

Values or Activity: Reality on Early Sexual Encounter among Adolescents in Zamboanga Peninsula

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ABSTRACT

The burgeoning teen-pregnancy annually with victims getting younger is a severely endless problem that hitherto is superficially understood in its real context. This study aimed to determine and intensely focus on the factors that influence early sexual encounters (ESE) to both adolescent boys and girls in the Zamboanga Peninsula, Philippines. To understand the underlying real phenomenological complexities, a mixed method, specifically the Sequential

Explanatory was utilized. Data were first gathered and analyzed through a cross-sectional correlational survey; followed by a Focus Group Discussion represented by the teen-dads, teen-moms, parents, and teachers. Correlational analysis showed that socio-economic and sexual desire factors were significant. However, when re-explored using qualitative research, analyzed through Mayring's Qualitative Content Analysis, economic status has no direct influential pattern to early engagement in sexual activities. For them, thematically, the quality of parental role in value formation was crucial. Given this shift, a schematic diagram was developed why teenagers nowadays engage too early sexual encounters: 1) seeking the parental role, 2) blinded to values, and 3) tearful regrets. Thus, through this realization, a proposed intervention of encapsulating culture, values, and parental involvement in the teaching strategies in the sex-education curriculum is timely.

Keywords - Social Science, teen-pregnancy, sequential explanatory, Zamboanga Peninsula – Philippines

INTRODUCTION

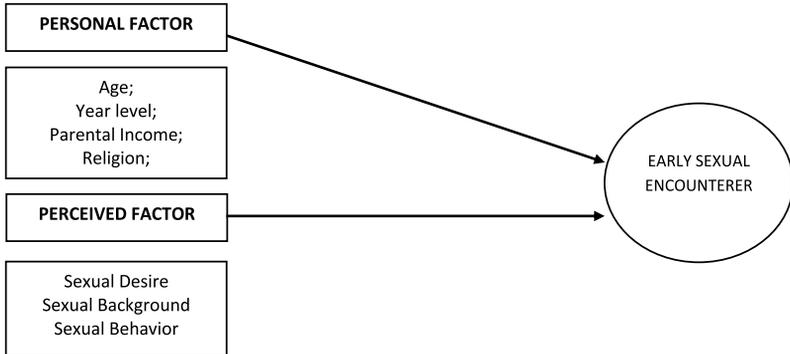
Early sexual encounter (ESE) is becoming a new trend among young teens globally, albeit the vast of strategic interventions formulated annually. This increasing incidence is a severe societal concern that threatens adolescents' growth and development. As the years passed, numbers of cases are getting worse to worst especially among Southeast Asian countries.

The Philippines has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates in Southeast Asia. From 14,205 in 1999, the case surge to 70% (Van der Hor, 2014). The traditional view of adolescence behavior towards ESE, alas, has drastically changed over time. This is influenced by multi-factorial facets that are yet superficially understood in its real contextual-phenomenon, perhaps, the primary reason why solutions drafted are obscure to fit at the right angle.

In the Zamboanga Peninsula, this dilemma is alarming. As of 2013, about 31.6% out of the 1000 teenage women interviewed have already engaged in pre-marital sex which is triple higher in 2002 at 11.9%. Notably, at early 13-year-old girls have already involved in sex, and 92% admitted that they did it "*out of love*" (Van der Hor, 2014). As a result, they end up with an unplanned pregnancy, myriad pre, and postnatal complications, school drop-outs, or even STIs/HIV as well. Yearly, sexual and reproductive health (SRH) programs, as well as researches were made by competent authorities within the region; however, it is a hanging question why such situation continuously progresses. Thus, this has a profound

implication that the current interventional programs must be restructured, whereby useful insights grounded on youth's opinions and needs should be uncovered to ensure policies are tailored-fit.

FRAMEWORK



OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to determine and intensely focus on factors that influence ESE expanding to both adolescent girls and boys in the Zamboanga Peninsula, Philippines. Through dual voicing among genders, soundness and rigor of data are ensured, wherein it is considered as the main strength for this investigation. Furthermore, this research is an initial foray towards a new comprehensive SRH education model designed to support the psychosexual development of responsible Filipino youth.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

To understand the complexities of the real phenomenological context, a mixed-method specifically the *Sequential Explanatory Research* was utilized. Consecutively, data were first gathered through a cross-sectional survey. Using a self-made Likert-scale type questionnaire, the correlation between the rates of ESE and other variables: demographics; environmental factors; physical activity; and perceptions towards adolescent sexuality, was analyzed. Before distribution, the tool used went to a series of modification and review from sets of hired experts; then piloted until finally, it reached a *Chronbach Alpha* result of **0.81**. The final

tool was distributed among the pre-selected 1,080 adolescents, who were scouted through multi-stage sampling across the region above. Numerical data, in this phase, were pre-analyzed in a Statistical Software (SPSS IBM – 21) employing percentile, cross-tabulation, weighted mean, chi-square, and ANOVA.

Research Site

Before data gathering procedures, a clearance from the university ethics review board was secured. In the case of identifying potential respondents, a passive snowballing technique was applied, wherein communication letters were sent initially to the Barangay Health Workers of the four (4) pre-selected municipalities within the region, namely: Buug – Zamboanga Sibugay, Pagadian – Zamboanga del Sur, Dipolog – Zamboanga del Norte, Zamboanga City. For safety reason, Isabela City was excluded from the locale of the study. Moreover, upon endorsement, formal one-on-one interactions to clarify the research's purpose and participant's rights were initiated. Equal samples between genders were also emphasized in the sampling process. Priority was given to focus on in-school students aged 12 – 19 years old. Worth to note, the final confirmation to include them in the population pool was a signed parental consent form. Correspondingly, pseudonyms and special codes were used for anonymity purposes.

Participants

Qualitative research was intentionally incorporated as a second phase of the methodological design to substantiate and provide depth in the analysis of the preliminary quantitative data. A 4-set Focus Group Discussion (FGD) participated by the teen moms, teen dads, parents, and teachers were separately conducted. Each cohort was composed of 7 volunteered representatives, who were purposively selected based on the imposed criterion. Guide questions used were purely anchored from the beforehand survey analysis and suggestions from a hired evaluator.

Instrumentation

The qualitative data were scrutinized following the Mayring's Qualitative Content Analysis principles. Thematic analyses were first done per group; then cross-analyzed to telescope the different lenses of the phenomenon from micro to macro view perspective⁵ (Catalan, 2015). Identified discrepancies were re-clarified among the FGD participants. Also, other referred raters were invited to counter-examine the concreteness of the findings. Lastly, results were then

triangulated to relevant scholarly journals to eliminate the personal conclusion of the paper.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Majority from the surveyed participants, who started ESE, were aged 18 to 19 years old (54%); whereas surprisingly the youngest age among both genders was 12 (0.5%). Regarding year level, 42% of the respondents had their first sexual encounter in tertiary level; while at the remarkable 9% of them started even as early as high school (HS) – the first year. Interestingly, Filipino teens, between third year HS to freshmen college, admitted that they were already in a “*live-in*” arrangement (**SF2, SF5, SM3**) (Jolley, 2018).

“The millennials were too westernize now. They believed that everything (*ESE*) in their generation is acceptably normal part of growing up.”

T1 (female-teacher)

Half of them (59%) came from families below 5,000 pesos monthly income. Accordingly, a large percentage of adolescents from this family income bracket engaged in ESE not merely because they lack money, but, their parents were overworking that they rarely spend quality time (**SF3, SF5**) (Udigwe, Adogu, Nwabueze, Adinna, Ubajaka, Onwasigwe, 2014). As a result, teens spend more time in the street or live in the neighborhood mimicking negative attitudes leading to low moral values and poor decision making (Malahlela & Chireshe, 2013; Udigwe, Adogu, Nwabueze, Adinna, Ubajaka, Onwasigwe, 2014; Weed & Nicholson, 2014). This learned negative values was the loophole factor why some if not all, teens were easily deceived by their suitor’s hopeful promises and financial/material tokens to give-in for ESE (**SF2, SF5, SM1, P2**) (Ankomah, Mamman-Daura, Omoregie, & Anyanti, 2011).

“I can’t refuse. I knew my boyfriend loved me. He’s the only person who dared to understand me and willingly provided the things I needed.

SF3 (female-student)

About 77% of the surveyed participants were Roman Catholics (77%). In countries where Catholicism is dominant, sex-discussion is a taboo (Nadal, Sriken, Davidoff, Wong, Y., & McLean, 2013). Religion in any shapes, indeed, play a pivotal function in adolescent’s development and sexuality, which can be

a restraining factor that will help teenagers to control and prevent tendencies of ESE (**T3; T6**) (Udigwe, Adogu, Nwabueze, Adinna, Ubajaka, Onwasigwe, 2014); Ghaffari, Gharghani, Mehrabi, Ramezankhani, & Movahed, 2016; Gyimah, Kodzi, Emina, Cofie, & Ezech, 2013). Among the teens interviewed, 70% of them (specifically among girls) said they went to churches “once a week.” However, with a follow question of how they were devoted or perceived the importance of religion to them, the percentage declined at nearly half (40%). For them, going to churches was their way to meet-up friends/partners (**SM3, SM4, SF1, P3**) and escape-goat from home (**SM5, SF3, P4**). The frequencies of attendance in religious services without valuing religion in their lives are more likely to commit premarital sex; in contrast to others who consistently and religiously follow their church doctrine (Jackson, 2016; Landor & Simons, 2011). It is believed that teens with a high level of religiosity had more conservative attitudes and views on ESE (T3) (Wamoyi, Fenwick, Urassa, Zaba, & Stones, 2010; Merkel, 2013; Weed & Nicholson, 2014).

“Many youths nowadays are fallen astray from religious practices and belief. If only parents guided their children very well and taught about God in their lifestyle, then they won’t get involved in this early-earthly-pleasure.”

T3 (female-teacher)

The extent of parent-adolescent communication affects teen’s health and development. Conversation at home is not merely an exchange of information, but, a venue where meaningful interaction, culture, and values interplays (**T7**) (Riesch, Anderson, Pridham, Lutz, & Becker, 2010). A more significant percentage of adolescents who discuss sex-topics with their parents were not sexually active compared to those who won’t (Wamoyi, Fenwick, Urassa, Zaba, & Stones, 2010). However, when questioned how teens were open to their parents about discussing “sex,” 67% said they preferred to talk this matter to peers and girlfriend/boyfriend in lieu because of they are afraid to their “authoritative-parents” (**SM1, SF3, P6**). While, 80% agreed that tackling “sex-matters” at home was useless since their parents were also victims of teenage pregnancy (**SF6, P5**) and incompetent to give advice (**SM3, P7**). Certainly, less closeness with parents denotes less guidance, navigating adolescents to poor coping skills, low morale, and unhealthy decisions (**T6**) (Ankomah, Mamman-Daura, Omoregie, & Anyanti, 2011; Tobey, Hillman, Anagurthi, & Somers, 2011). Conspicuously between genders, males (34%) rarely shared “sex-discussions” with their parents unlike females (57%). Perhaps, because at home, mothers are the sex-education

counselors and sons find it awkward to discuss. They're looking for a manly/father-figure instead (**SM6**) (Ayalew, Mengistie, & Semahegn, 2014; Wamoyi, Fenwick, Urassa, Zaba, & Stones, 2010; Tobey, Hillman, Anagurthi, & Somers, 2011). This is the primary reason why they preferred to discourse things with their male peers or other friends.

“It’s hard to open-up things like these to our parents.
Their generation is different from us.”

SM1 (male-student)

Estimated 66% from them pointed out via television; followed by 52% from social media: FB, Twitter, and Instagram. Between genders, most males watched TV (73%) and spent more on social media (64%) compared to females (23%) and (30%) respectively. When interviewed, teens believed that what have seen: kissing and hugging scenes, were all normal, “okay,” and tolerated by their parents (**SM5, SF2, P3, P7**). Sexual content in the general media, undeniably, affects the cognitive skills of average teenage viewers, which parents should be cautious (**T6**) (Kimemia & Mugambi, 2016). These so-called minor sexual gestures are surprisingly normal and acceptable at their young age; where in fact, these can somehow trigger the innocent mind to explore on the worst next move or the beginning of sexual-desire-stimulation (**T4**) (Kearney & Levine, 2015). This will get worse when they're directly exposed to pornography either via television or any social media, which will later lead in developing sexual compulsion or addictive behavior (**T3; T5**) (Peter & Valkenburg, 2011; Stanley et al., 2016). Such a phenomenon can be simplified in a cyclical form: from an innocent exchange of e-messages and I-pictures, apparently, to flirting; sexting and webcam abuse; then curiosity to live-experiment (**SM3, SM5, SF2, SF7**) (Stanley et al., 2016; Udigwe, Adogu, Nwabueze, Adinna, Ubajaka, Onwasigwe, 2014).

“It started by simply liking the status in Facebook.
Then we exchanged simple greetings to messages later pictures.
We decided to have ‘eyeball’ or meet-up.”

SF2 (female-student)

“I just copied what I’ve seen on television or web.
From simple experiment into something, I became obsessive.
‘Twas normal for us boys.”

SM5 (male-student)

On the one hand, teens' higher rates of physical activities involvement: sports or dance, were also found significantly associated with lower rates of ESE (Habel, Dittus, De Rosa, Chung, & Kerndt, 2010; Noguira et al., 2016). Participation in such activity has a positive impact on their intra-being: social behavior, leadership, self-protection, self-worth, self-esteem, high moral, higher goals, and good health (Hooper, Gurven, Winking, & Hooper, Gurven, Winking, & Kaplan, 2015; Kaplan, Jones, Olson, & Yunzal-Butler, 2013; Merkel, 2013). Hypothetically, participation to this gives teens positive alternatives where they divert their attention, balance time, and prioritize focus leading to less opportunity to engage in potential sexual encounters or negative health-risk behavior (Bean, Forneris, & Halsall, 2014; Noguiera et al., 2016). But, when the surveyed respondents were asked about this, only 56% indulged in dancing (most girls), while 44% were into sports (dominantly boys). And, roughly 59% and 50% spent not more than 30 minutes a week respectively. With a follow-up question, why? Teens preferred to consume time on social media updates or stalking their crushes (**SM3, SF2**), and their parents were unsupportive (**SM5, T1**). Whereas for those dance troupe members, interesting to note, instead of developing sisterhood/brotherhood they were vulnerable to tendencies in ESE due to consecutive overnights and out-of-town (**SM2, SF7, P3**). Thus, for effectiveness, it is essential to adopt a wholesome activity-focused intervention where culture, values, and parental-involvement are given importance (**T7**) (Merkel, 2013; Sluijs & Kriemler, 2016; Sutherland et al., 2016).

“It’s useless and not motivating when my parents
were not there to support me.”

SM5 (male-student)

Teens' perception of sexuality as categorized by sexual desire, sexual orientation/background, and sexual behavior, was highlighted. With an average weighted mean (AWM) score of 2.61, it can be denoted that the surveyed participants can be categorically considered having the moderate level of sexual desire. As claimed, their urged for ESE was part of their notion of “expression of love” (**SM3, SF6, and SF7**). And such “repeat episodes” were their way to show “faithfulness” to their teen-partners (**SF5, SF6**). Regarding sexual orientation/background, this group has limited knowledge (AWM = 2.83) on possible consequence when involved in ESE. They believed that having one sexual partner was safe, and getting pregnant was “by chance” or will only happen for

20 years old and above individuals (**SM7, SF2**). With a follow-up question in case pregnancy will occur, both genders were confident that “their families are still willing to support them” (**SM2, SM4, SF4, SF6**). Unfortunately, among this teen-cohort 73% were already teen-parents at the early ages between 14 – 18 years old. Lastly, it can be depicted that respondents didn’t care about their future and the aftermath of ESE (AWM = 2.77). For them, it was their only option to stick in temporary relationships and so-called happiness (**SM4, SF4, and SF7**). Noticeably, more than a half of them were forced to quit schooling to do new parenting responsibilities.

“As a partner, I did my part because I love him.
And if by accident, I got pregnant at least to the man whom I love.”
SF7 (female-student)

When the correlation of all variables was analyzed, only sexual desire (0.035) and parental monthly income (0.019) were highly significant. However, when re-explored using a cross-FGD, an interrelated pattern was overarching:

Seeking for Parental Role

More than the financial satisfaction, teenagers were seeking for quality parental-relationship where: (1) they felt accepted and not judged (**SM1, SM3, SM4, SF1, SF6, T3**); (2) there is comfort, in which not too stiff nor authoritative; but instead there are respect and open-mindedness (**SM2, SM7, SF2, SF3**); (3) time to listen attentively and actively talk with them, in pains, sorrows and joy (**SM5, SF7, P2, T4**); (4) knowledgeable to guide them on the holistic approach towards “sex-matters” appropriate to age (**SM2, SF3, P4, T7**). As an effect, teens seek parental affection to others, to whom they felt temporary happiness and acceptance (**SM6, SF1, and T3**).

“How I wish my parents have time to listen and understand me.”
P2 (teen’s-mother)

Blinded to Values

A weak foundation of quality parent-adolescent relationship only inculcated anxiety, anger, low self-esteem and poor value-formation to teenagers (**T4, T6**). In turn, they started to become rebellious to their parents by doing activities under irresponsible decision-making (**SM2, SM3, SF4, SF7**). They never mind on self-

respect (**SM3, SM7, SF1**), role setting (**SF1, SF7**), and worst they perceived discipline as “against their will or human rights” (**SM3, SM4, SF2, SF7**). Adolescents are becoming blinded because of their internal pessimism (**P2, T3**). They cannot find happiness at home that they preferred enjoying with their peers and boyfriends/girlfriends instead (**SM3, SM4, SF5, and SF7**). Interestingly, in some cases, they were deceived by their partner’s hopeful promises and material tokens given (**SM3, SF2**). They’ll do everything to make their partners happy and satisfied, to stick to an uncertain relationship (**SF3, SF4**).

“Parental-role was a big factor why I indulged into ESE.
I felt unloved and not important.”
SF6 (female-student)

“Youth today are aggressive or ‘super-hot.’
Most of them would dare such a thing (ESE)
without thinking its possible consequences.”
P6 (teen’s father)

“Admittedly, they immediately gave up their dignity because they were
deceived by their suitor’s gifts and material things that
we couldn’t afford to provide.”
P7 (teen’s-mother)

Tearful Regrets

This was the period of a lot “ifs and buts.” Unwanted pregnancy due to ESE bears serious repercussions to both teen-dads and teen moms. Such a circumstance was associated with multiple long-term negative outcomes. Ambivalence started to arise in their mind whether to hold new responsibilities or to continue growing up as a teenager (**SM2, SM4, and SF5**). Between genders, females were carrying the greater burden. Aside from struggling about herself and her baby’s future, they’re unsure whether their boyfriends will marry and support them, if there is “forever,” or leave them hanging (**SF1, SF6**). Not only teens have remorse, their parents as well have regrets why such circumstances or “curse” repeatedly happening to their children, yet they were powerless to thwart it (**P3; P7**).

“If only I have listened to my parents and refused,
for the sake of my dignity.”
SF1 (female-student)

“Being a teen-dad was difficult.
I have to take extra-responsibility at my age.”

SM3 (male-student)

Findings showed that the SRH program lacks a family-based intervention. Albeit, socio-economic is highly correlated; however, the quality of parental care has clearer ingrain why teenagers were pushed to ESE. Irrefutably, teen's life is a mixed-bag of uncertain emotions and doubts. This is their crucial developmental-phase, where they **SEEK** quality time with their parents, who are unfortunately over-working or ill-prepared. In turn, gargantuan pessimism is developed in their intra-being; unconsciously pulverizing their premature inculcated personal values. Because of being desperate, adolescent(s) search affection of a parental-figure to others: friends/partners, to fill-in their feeling-of-emptiness. They tend to **BLIND** themselves, doing activities without thinking its cons, just to fit into an unsure relationship where they find comfort and acceptance. Such poor decisions, eventually, lead to independent regrets, whereby what they can only do in the end is to let their powerless **TEARS** fell.

In the adults' perspectives, blames are usually pushed to teenagers why they did this and that; without considering that the types of their activities were merely by-products of their parental relationships. It is important to note that adolescents are not liable for their risky sexual activities. They engaged in ESE at their early age because their parents deprived them of their rights to the quality parent-adolescent relationship. This calls urgency that instead of providing tampering panacea, parents should be taught with both basic pieces of knowledge on youth's SRH and their crucial developmental needs.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, parental-role and value formation interplay significantly in adolescent's perception and lure for sexual activity. The quality of parent-adolescent relationship has clearer ingrain, why teens indulged in ESE.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

Results of this research paper may be translated through a journal article for publications. Further, this can be used as a scientific reference to re-engineer the sex-education curriculum in the country and the conservative nations in the Asia

Pacific. Furthermore, it can be utilized as the basis to draft future resolutions and national policies relevant to the youth's sexual and reproductive health rights.

RECOMMENDATION

Sex-education curriculum must encapsulate Filipino culture and values to its core objectives, filling-in the parental lapses. Moreover, the campaign for SRH should be extended among parents, allowing them to be edified on the holistic youth's development and welfare. Findings generated do not only robust the insights on how-and-why the proposed-intervention be incorporated into the teaching strategies, but also allows more in-depth evaluation approaches.

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