

Title:

How young women experience motherhood: An experiential analysis

Abstract

This research undertakes a comprehensive study on the experience of motherhood by young women by evaluating the experiences/challenges faced by them during their early motherhood. The literature review presents a standard assessment of the concepts and theories to find out the research gap in association with the topic by emphasizing the reproductive health of young mothers, education attainment, health outcomes, and challenges of early motherhood while drawing inferences from the human rights to conduct a critical analysis on the secondary findings. The section on methodology discussed the varied methods and techniques employed for collecting primary data. Precisely, 5 young female participants were selected from different ethnicities and age groups between 14-22 years who are either pregnant or have experienced motherhood recently. The participants are connected to conduct the semi-structured interviews centred on the research questions. The responses thus obtained are focused on evaluating the results followed by a critical discussion.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Research Aim:

To identify the experiences/challenges faced by young mothers during early motherhood and suggest measures that can be taken and can be helpful for young mothers in dealing with the situation. Additionally, the research also intends to provide substantial information that can become helpful for future studies.

1.2 Background of the study:

Motherhood is one of the most significant events in a woman's life where the role of motherhood requires necessary abilities, appropriate behaviour, and the establishment of maternal identity (Mangeli et.al., 2017). The transition to motherhood, adulthood and maternal adjustment is impacted greatly by the preparations for accepting the maternal role and the increasing number of teenage mothers has been adding up to the already complex role of motherhood (Mangeli et.al., 2017). Early motherhood not only affects adolescent girls but also their "spouse, family, school and the society at large" as the transition requires multi-faceted preparedness that is physical, social, psychological as well as cognitive, and teenage mothers are seldom prepared not to mention that most of the times they are not even aware of becoming pregnant until it's late to turn back from pregnancy (Mangeli et.al., 2017).

The world witnessed around 121 million unintended pregnancies year on year from 2015 to 2019 wherein around 61% of pregnancies ended with an induced abortion (Tripathi, 2022). World Health Organization (2022) highlights that as of 2019, an estimated 21 million adolescent pregnancies were recorded in low-income and middle-income countries, wherein the mothers have been between 15-19 years and approximately 50% of the pregnancies were found to be unintended with an estimated 12 million births. Additionally, 55% of adolescent unintended pregnancies were recorded to have ended in abortions which are not only unsafe

but also puts young mothers at a higher risk of eclampsia, puerperal endometritis, systemic infections, low birth weight, preterm birth and severe neonatal condition (WHO, 2022). According to a report by Young Women's Trust (2020) wherein the study was conducted from October 2016 to February 2017, it was noted that for young mothers aged under 25 years, money has been one of the major concerns regarding handling motherhood including the financial situation of 61% mothers, while 25% notified of experiencing discrimination at the workplace when the employer discovered about their pregnancy. Young Women's Trust (2020) report also highlighted that mothers felt they were being "judged negatively because of their age" and to top it off, they get criticized by "members of the public and feel alienated from mainstream mother and toddler groups".

Early motherhood is itself a challenging situation, Williamson (2013) highlights that many countries have made efforts towards preventing adolescent pregnancies but the actions were more inclined towards changing a girl's behaviour based on the belief that it is the responsibility of the girl to prevent early pregnancy and if she fails, it's her fault. These perceptions and approaches make it even more difficult for the young mother to deal with the situations and challenges, not to mention the fact that it meddles with their mental well-being too along with the physical stress of bearing a child at an early age. Williamson's (2013) study focused on girls aged between 15 to 19 years of age who were found to be vulnerable towards *"complications and death from pregnancy and childbirth"*; *"are typically overlooked by, or beyond the reach of, national health, education and development institutions, often because these girls are in forced marriages and are prevented from attending school or accessing sexual and reproductive health services"* (p. ii). Al-Kloub et.al. (2019) is also of the view that the experiences associated with early marriage and motherhood have a direct connection with poor outcomes at both physical as well as social levels. In their study, Al-Kloub et.al. (2019) noted that young women undergoing early marriage and

motherhood have "lost opportunities for personal development, learning to be submissive and indecisive, uncertainty towards cultural norms, ambivalent feelings toward a maternal role and empowering oneself to face life demands". These challenges and experiences of young women add up to their already complicated situation of facing motherhood at an early age. Erfina et.al. (2019) highlight that becoming a mother and having babies during early age or adolescence leads to health consequences for both the girl as well as the infant. One reason is that the adolescent bodies are developed completely which leads to higher rates of "life-threatening or debilitating conditions as a result of pregnancy" (Erfina et.al., 2019). In a study conducted by Mjwara and Maharaj(2018) on young women and motherhood in the KwaZulu-Natal town of South Africa, it was noted that young mothers had their first child when they were still at school and none of them had either intended or had planned to have a child, and hence, they were not ready for motherhood and a contributing factor was also the limited information available on pregnancy and its prevention. Despite wanting to assume the financial responsibility for their child, women found it difficult to do so because of varied reasons such as non-existent relationships with fathers, dependency on parents' support, and lack of education and career aspirations (Mjwara and Maharaj, 2018). Hoffman (2018) highlights that as a consequence of motherhood, some women stop working altogether so that they can take care of their young children leading to the mothers getting driven towards depression, while some worked multiple jobs to make ends meet leaving their kids in hands of nannies or care staff or with their parents.

Considering the findings of different studies on young mothers and their challenges/experiences with regard to motherhood, this study aims to study and identify major challenges and experiences that young mothers go through, with the intention of finding/suggesting solutions that can prove helpful to young mothers.

1.3 Research Methodology:

The process of “arriving at a dependable solution to a problem through planned and systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data” is called research (Devi, 2017). Munot and Bairagi (2019) define it as a “systematic investigation to gain new knowledge from already existing facts”. Considering the need of the present study, qualitative research methodology has been chosen as the study intends to explore the experiences of young mothers during motherhood at an early age which is a form of study "related to human behaviour" wherein the reaction to situations may differ (Munot, and Bairagi,2019) and that's where the qualitative study proves helpful. For this study, Qualitative research with a semi-structured interview approach has been taken into consideration wherein interview data related to experience sharing of young women in previous studies have been taken into consideration. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to keep the questions random and not in a specific order wherein the interview question does not necessarily have to have the same words that are used while interviewing the participant (Flick, 2021). The semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to record the views and experiences of the participants from their perspectives and don't restrict them to stick to specific close-ended options to questions, which is exactly what the study intends to collect as part of data collection (Flick, U. (2021), and hence, semi-structured interviews have been taken into consideration for the study.

A pre-prepared questionnaire has been used wherein the questions complementing the theme of the study have been picked up from previously conducted studies to pick up the statistical data (Thomas, 2021) that has been further subjected to "Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)", an experiential approach to qualitative research (Smith, Larkin and Flowers, 2021). The IPA approach allows the researchers to explore the "lived experiences "of the research participants in a more detailed manner. In other words, IPA is a form of qualitative

research methodology that allows the researcher to examine and make sense of the life experiences of the participants (Alase, 2017). The methodology and data analysis methods have been chosen to keep in mind the requirement of the study which requires the analysis of the experiences of young mothers and the circumstances or situations that they undergo as a consequence of becoming mothers at a young age.

The dominating themes for the identification of experiences/challenges will involve the following situations:

1. An unmarried woman who is about to become a mother
2. Single mother having a husband in some other country and is living alone
3. A young mother living in a big family
4. A single mother with financial difficulty
5. Well-educated and independent mother with having good family

1.4 Research Questions:

1. What are the challenges faced by women when they move away from foster/residential care and live independently?
2. What are the challenges faced by young women when they undergo a transition to adulthood due to early motherhood?
3. Do the culture and demographics affect early motherhood and pose related challenges?
4. Do you go to college? What are the challenges and complexities faced during young motherhood that lead to an impact on studies?
5. Do you feel neglected by your folks (including parents, peers, relatives etc.) due to pregnancy at a young age?
6. What mental and physical challenges or negative situations do you go through or have gone through during motherhood?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Motherhood is a significant phase in a woman's life. The preparation to accept the maternal role require adequate adjustment and transition to adulthood, however, the increasing numbers of teenage mothers have evolved as a major concern across the world (Erfini et al 2019). According to the WHO (2019), more or less 16 million teenage/ adolescent girls give birth across the world, and Sub-Saharan Africa has the maximum rate of teenage birth and the minimum in South Korea.

Early motherhood is not challenging for adolescent girls but also has a significant impact on their family, spouse, school and society at large. The transition to mother requires a woman to be physically, socially, psychologically and cognitive preparedness. Motherhood becomes convoluted and cumbersome for teenage mothers, especially those who simultaneously conduct the maternal role and development tasks of being adolescence together (Datta et al 2017). They are required to adapt to the social adulthood roles, physical transformation of puberty, significant brain development and nurturing the infant. It has been observed that the majority of teenage mothers do not belong to a good socio-economic background, hence their transition to motherhood becomes significantly challenging for them.

2.2 Reproductive Health of Teenage Mothers

Globally, the reproductive health of adolescents is influenced by multiple inherently complex and interrelated factors that range from personal preferences, socio-economic cultural factors, socio-economic factors, and the health systems. According to the study conducted by Smith & Ashby, (2022), teenage or young mothers face several challenges in the context of society, including psychological, physical and spiritual aspects. The problems incurred from the lack of maternal skills, inadequate planning and decision-making, high-risk pregnancy and birth,

mental health issues (anxiety, isolation, depression, shock, low-self confidence), identity crisis and role conflict, lack of spiritual and social support, disruptive education and employment, social stigma, inappropriate health care providers, culturally negative reactions, and potential family conflicts.

2.3 Attainment of Education in School and University

Until recently, the majority of the studies on young mothers have concluded that early motherhood/parenthood has a significant effect on the attainment of education of young girls (Pryce & Samuels, 2010). For example, young mothers are unlikely to continue their education after giving birth and obtain the low level of literacy that their peer groups in school and University. The recent studies by Gill et al (2016), argue that this gap is reducing partly due to the increase in GED (general equivalency degree) programs, welfare education in school, and progressive school policies. According to Guhn et al (2020), education plays a major role in lifestyle and pregnancy decisions among teenagers, For example, teenagers/adolescents who are focused on secondary and higher education are more likely to get graduated from high school. Alternatively, young girls who are school dropouts are at a greater risk of pregnancy. In addition, societal problems have a significant impact on the education of young mothers. The challenges range from moral collapse, isolation and social stigma about early menarche.

2.4 Health outcomes

Adolescent mothers tend to experience a higher level of pregnancy problems and delivery challenges and give birth to less healthy babies than old mothers. The deleterious health outcomes are mainly associated with the lack of prenatal care and poverty which is common among teenage girls. There are greater risks associated with the socio-economic disadvantages owing to less education, poor diet, bigger families, and lack of guidance and support leading to early marriages of teenage girls. Ochen, Chi & Lawoko (2019) highlighted

that teenage pregnancy is associated with problematic behaviours of the adolescents such as drug abuse, alcohol consumption, and prone sexual engagement. The rate of death is more in adolescents due to the greater risk of birth complications, unsafe abortions, and psychosocial challenges such as the consequences of prolonged neglect from their partners. Amjad et al (2019) opined that early motherhood is associated with adverse developmental outcomes for both the mother and child. Young mothers typically give birth at their formative stage hence they face critical challenges in childcare which can influence the health and well-being of both the mother and children. It has been observed that the children of young mothers have experienced delays in their cognitive development and language skills, whereas young mothers face a greater risk of suicide attempts due to the increased propensity of mental health problems and continuous experience of stressful life events. However, such differences are becoming less distinctive in recent research studies due to the increasing health services for young mothers.

2.5 Increasing Mortality in young mothers

Adolescent pregnancy has remained to be the major contributor to maternal and child mortality along with the inter-generational cycle of poverty and ill health. Complications during childbirth and pregnancy are the leading cause of death among young girls of the age range of 15-19 years globally (Hasan et al 2019). In addition, middle and low-income countries account for 97.85% of maternal deaths globally within the age range of 15-35 years. Adolescent mothers (age range between 15-19 years) face high risks of puerperal endometritis, eclampsia, and systematic infections than women aged between 22-30 years (Kiani, Ghazanfarpour & Saeidi, 2019). In addition, approximately 3.9 billion unsafe abortions of young adolescent girls give rise the maternal mortality and lasting health issues (Nkhoma et al 2020). According to Verlinden et al (2019), in middle and low-income countries, babies born to mothers under the age of 20 years face significantly high risks of

preterm delivery, low birth weight and severe neonatal conditions that can potentially have long-term effects. Young mothers and their newborn babies are at a higher risk of HIV which increases the risk of mortality in young mothers. According to WHO (2021), the risk of death following early pregnancy is twice as high in girls aged between 15-19 years in comparison to women aged between 20-24 years. The rate of maternal mortality can be even five times high for girls aged between 15-19 years than for women who are between the age group of 20-24 years.

2.6 Move away from foster/residential care and live independently

The need for emotional, social and psychological support becomes crucial for both the young mothers and the newborns. Young mothers are generally rejected by their parents and chased away from home/residential care because their parents do not approve of early pregnancies, hence they decide to live independently (Hymas & Girard, 2019). In some cases, forced marriages and continuous neglect from the partners in aspects of lack of social and financial responsibilities leads to significant Psychosocial challenges. The combination of lack of family support, partner and community support for the young mothers reinforces their exclusion from a better lifestyle and improved health services. According to the studies by Hartas (2021), young mothers experience postpartum depression as a result of early childbirth. Adolescent mothers face challenges in their individual development besides the challenges of taking child care which gets further aggravated by low family support, and delinquent and aggressive behaviour (Desbouys et al 2020). On the contrary, the separation from husband/partners, and family, and moving away from residential care are more likely to trigger emotional and behavioural problems in young mothers.

2.7 Cultural and Socio-economic Status

The cultural impact on young mothers is significantly the result of patriarchal culture and gender stereotypes. Hence, there is a high chance of adolescents who get physically assaulted

and face hostile situations by their partners. According to Workicho et al (2019), a low socio-economic background is closely associated with single and early motherhood. The lack of compulsory education leads to unemployment and professional failure which in turn have a strong influence on the depressive symptoms of young mothers (Hasan et al 2019). The researchers highlighted that the risk factors associated with mental health illness in young mothers coexist due to the structural disparities occurring between the generations. Lack of a healthy diet and malnutrition during pregnancy is a major concern and marked issue amongst young mothers that can even lead to complications of childbirth (Musa et al 2021). Hence, societal support and improved healthcare services are crucial for teenage mothers to encourage them to continuation of education, support the well-being of children and facilitation of effective transition from adolescence to motherhood.

2.8 Transition from adolescence to Motherhood – Physical and mental health challenges

Pregnant adolescents or young mothers are vulnerable to poor health outcomes for three specific reasons. Adolescence faces a transitional stage which is characterized by biological, psychological and social changes. The phases of pregnancy and parenting during the critical period interfere with the normative development processes whereas the dual biological transitions from adolescence to pregnancy tend to increase their physical and psychological vulnerability (Ayazbekov et al 2020). Hence, the potential impact of the neurobiological transformations is notably observed in young mothers who tend to experience a higher level of depression, stress and anxiety than older mothers. The social changes experienced by pregnant adolescents get associated with their poor mental health outcomes (Mueller, Flouri & Kokosi, 2019). Pregnancy is a visible manifestation of early sexual activity that typically results in social stigma, discrimination and blaming that have a strong negative consequence on psychosocial well-being, leading to an increased level of stress, depression and isolation.

Besides the associated risks with the transition of adolescents to motherhood, young mothers face significant transformations in their physical health and face potential complications which are linked to early pregnancy and childbirth. Such complications increase their stress exponentially and while making them vulnerable to several physical and mental disorders. According to Marvin-Dowle & Soltani (2020), the risks specifically associated with young mothers include the high probability of obstetric fistula that leads to premature delivery. Such prevalent challenges have triggered or compounded the existing vulnerabilities to poor mental health, conversely resulting in psychological distress and poor physical health outcomes.

Lastly, adolescent pregnancy occurs in a risk-prone environment that will expose the young mothers to the multiple factors of psychosocial barriers and distress in the context of accessing adequate support and healthcare. As studied by Ngandu et al (2020), two-thirds of the pregnancy are mostly unintended that introduce young mothers to evolving responsibilities and new demands during their transition to parenthood. There are situations where pregnant adolescents may get involved in relationships with a high age gap that may not sustain following their early pregnancy. Also, teenagers who get pregnant outside the context of marriage are profoundly stigmatised which prevents them from accessing the broader network of support.

Consequently, the researcher by Tosun et al (2019) states a bi-directional correlation between youth pregnancy and the risk factors associated with it. The poverty and risk-prone vulnerable environment tends to drive the rate of pregnancy in young adolescents owing to the risk factors of substance abuse, school dropout, early marriage, partner violence, and economic deprivation which gets even more exacerbated following the pregnancy and early childbirth.

2.9 Human Rights

According to the UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund), pregnancies among adolescents/young girls less than 18 years of age tend to have irreparable consequences in the long term. Such a situation violates the rights of girls with life-threatening consequences in the context of good education, better health and wellbeing, career growth and prosperity, the right time for marriage, reproductive health, etc (Laurenzi et al 2020). This, in turn, poses high developmental costs for the communities specifically in perpetuating the cycle of poverty. The human rights specifically focusing on the health consequences indicates that an adolescent girl is not physically ready for pregnancy and childbirth before the age of 20 years, hence as a negative consequence of early pregnancy, it can lead to malnutrition and complications as the majority of the young mothers are most likely to come from the low-economic background with a poor education background.

Teenage pregnancy affects the right to education and income potential for young girls as they are forced to drop out of school which ultimately threatens their economic prospects and future opportunities (Amjad et al 2019). In addition to that, early motherhood has a significant effect on the psychosocial development of newborns/infants. The children born to young mothers are delivered prematurely having low birth weight, which can also predispose them to potential health consequences for lifelong.

2.10 Critical evaluation

A large population of growing adolescents have aided the higher rate of neonatal and child mortality, particularly in low-income or low-socio-economic settings. In such societies, young adolescent girls face the challenges of poor education, unemployment, conflict, and lack of access to healthcare which leads to the propensity of unintended pregnancies (Howard & Khalifeh, 2020). For such a group, psychosocial interventions constitute valuable for the promotion of positive mental and physical health outcomes and the prevention of risk

behaviours. In particular, the positive mental health outcome emphasizes identifying how social support can nurture interpersonal relationships which can be an essential focus to the fostering of mental and physical health outcomes within this population. It can even have a positive role play to interrupt the intergenerational cycles of continuous diversity and risks (Liang et al 2019). However, the lack of evidence from middle and low-income countries has prevented a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of social vulnerabilities in this population thereby restraining the adoption of appropriate measures to address them. For example, data on the high prevalence of HIV amongst adolescent girls is available; similarly, the data on the rate of pregnancy in adolescent young girls in a particular region is readily available, yet these data are considered rare to evaluate the scale of the phenomenon (Wado, Sully & Mumah, 2019). Consequently, there is an urgent need for the adaptation or designing of advanced psychosocial interventions that act as guidance to young mothers, pregnant adolescents, and extended social networks having the explicit aim to improve their health conditions.

2.11 Research Gap

Even though the knowledge concerning the prevalence and demographics of teenage sexuality and pregnancy is increasing in the research field, however significantly less research has been undertaken to address the psychological factor and procedures that can predict the occurrence of teenage birth. There have been researches on the influence of general social competence on the sexuality decisions of teenagers, Paikoff's work on the preadolescent's understanding and appraisals of sexual intentions, and research on the emotional deprivation model of adolescent pregnancy. However, there is a lack of research studies on the psychological contributions to teenage sexuality and young mothers that must be continued and expanded on. A large number of psychological tasks of adolescents get impeded by early parenthood. During the phase of adolescence, teenagers often face the

challenges of establishing their self-identity and seeking independence and autonomy from their parents. With its continuous demands and responsibilities, Parenthood can have negligible time for exploration and appropriate individualization in the areas of normative teen concerns such as dating, peer relationships, schooling, and career choices. Young mothers tend to reach conflicting demands following psychological distress that can be perhaps expressed through depressive symptomatology. Hence, this particular research emphasizes addressing the psychological effects of unplanned early parenthood and the processes that may allow some girls or young mothers to overcome the disruptive experiences of their situation.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology:

"Research" word has varied definitions and meanings attached to it which differ based on discipline and domain of expertise, however, the functions associated with the term are common, which is "to find answers to the research question" (Kumar, 2018) which are achieved by taking into consideration the approach and methods suited for the respective study. Devi (2017) adds that "research is simply the process of arriving at a dependable solution to a problem through planned and systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of data". For the purpose and nature of the current study, qualitative research type has been taken into consideration as qualitative research allows the study of "phenomena relating to or involving quality or kind" i.e. when the study requires investigation of reasons behind certain human behavioural patterns or overall behaviour (Devi, 2017). As qualitative research allows the research to be conducted by considering different parameters, it allows to focus on individuals and their behaviour (Munot and Bairagi, 2019), which is needed for the current study, hence, qualitative research methodology was chosen for the study.

3.1 Research Design:

3.1.1 Participants:

The study used a total of 5 young female participants belonging to different ethnicities and falling in the age group of 14-22 years. The varied range of participants included women who, at the time of the interview, were either pregnant or had experienced motherhood while being at a young age. Keeping in mind the ethical obligation of the study, the names of the participants have been changed to ensure privacy and animosity.

3.1.2 Research Methodology and Design:

The qualitative research methodology allows the usage of various methods that can be used to understand and examine the experiences of individuals from their perspectives (Hutter,

Hennink and Bailey, 2020). In-depth interviews are a way of conducting qualitative research that allows us to understand the "context of people's experiences" in a detailed manner (Hutter, Hennink and Bailey, 2020). For the purpose of the study, Semi-Structured Interviews (SSIs) were taken into consideration for data collection which employed a blend of closed and open-ended questions along with follow-up questions related to how/what/why of the situation (Adams, 2015). For the study, questions were kept open-ended wherein the detailed responses of the participants were taken into consideration. Thematic analysis is a form of analytics used in qualitative research methods and has been used in the study to deduce themes of varied experiences of young women with regard to early motherhood. The reason behind choosing thematic analysis is that it allows identification, analysis and reporting of patterns with regard to data (Scharpand Sanders, 2018) that eventually lead to the determination of themes that can be associated with the data collected. The study involved the exploration of the solution to 6 research questions based on different themes that represented the experiences of young women with regard to pregnancy and motherhood. The following interview questions were used for the study:

- Did you attempt to move out of the foster/parents' home? What were the challenges faced by you when thought or moved away from foster/residential care to live independently?
- What were the challenges faced by you when you were undergoing the transition to adulthood due to early motherhood?
- Do the culture and demographics affect early motherhood and pose related challenges?
- Do you go to college? What are the challenges and complexities faced during young motherhood that lead to an impact on studies?

- Do you feel neglected by your folks (including parents, peers, relatives etc.) due to pregnancy at a young age?
- What mental and physical challenges or negative situations do you go through or have gone through during motherhood?

3.1.3 Research Approach:

The approach used for data examination in the study is of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which focuses on examining the ways in which an individual makes meaning out of their experiences (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012). The IPA analytical process involves dual interpretation wherein "firstly, the participants make meaning of their world and experiences and secondly, the researcher tries to decode that meaning" to conclude (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012). Because the study involves the accumulation of 'experiences' of young mothers during pregnancy, the IPA analysis approach has been chosen for the study

3.1.4 Procedure:

The study was conducted by taking participants interviewed individually. To conduct the interviews, participants' consent was taken beforehand and to ensure their privacy and animosity, the names of the participants were changed. The interviews were recorded in audio mode so that the actual data could be reviewed in its original form. With the application of IPA, a repeated review of the interviews was done to extract relevant intercepts as per the requirement of the study. Once the relevant intercepts were chosen, thematic analysis was subjected to the shortlisted data wherein the following themes were identified to analyze the challenges in different situations:

1. An unmarried woman who's about to become a mother
2. Single mother having a husband in some other country and is living alone
3. A young mother living in a big family
4. A single mother with financial difficulty

5. Well-educated and independent mother with a good family background

Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Thematic Analysis of Interview Results

Theme 1: Challenges of undergoing the transition from adulthood to early motherhood

The responses obtained from the young mothers or the prospective mothers have indicated several challenges they have faced during their transition from adulthood to motherhood. Respondent 1 informed, *"I frequently felt alone and alienated as a young mother because there weren't many people I could ask for assistance or guidance from"*. This implies the lack of support from their community during their transition period was the biggest obstacle they encountered. There has been a common opinion where the respondents have shared their emotional stress where they feel anxious, overworked, and dissatisfied while juggling between the demands of parenthood and various other obligations. Respondent 2 stated that *"I faced financial instability"* and explained that *"As a young mother, I didn't have a lot of resources or a stable source of income"*. This implies the financial challenges and stress situations faced during this transition as young mothers are unable to afford their basic living such as rent, food and childcare. In addition, the social stigma and judgments make them isolated and impact their emotional state to a great extent. Respondent 3 opined their feeling of *"I have missed out on certain aspects of teenage life"* and also informed that *"I had to prioritize the needs of my child and become financially independent"*. In contrast, respondent 4 shared her personal views stating *"Becoming a mother at a young age has given me a sense of purpose and direction"*. It could be observed that for some, the transition has been constructive that has catered them a sense of fulfilment and love. Conversely, respondent 5 points out the external pressure of becoming a *"good mother"* that becomes

“*overwhelming at times*”. On the contrary, the respondents have faced the challenge of maintaining a fulfilling and healthy social life while being a mother.

Theme 2: Top priorities as a Mother

The majority of the respondents have provided similar views keeping the security and health of their children as the key priority. The mothers are mainly concerned with a safe and secure home environment for their children, access to food and higher-quality of medical treatment. Respondent 1 has emphasized on the development of a "*close emotional bond with my child is a high goal for me*", alternatively, respondent 3 focused on the healthy and safe environment of her children to ensure the baby gets "*enough sleep, nutritious meals and staying up to date on her vaccinations and check-ups*". Respondent 2 prioritizes both on the "*child's well-being*" along with "*self-care and personal growth*". She has been found stressing about taking out time for herself, pursuing her interests, and hobbies and may also continue their education or career. Respondent 4 has been showing her interest to provide "*a stable and nurturing home environment for my child*" as she believes to establish positive behaviours and values for her child. These responses make clear indications that the top priorities of young mothers are primarily concerned about the safe, secure, loving and supportive established for their children. Respondent 5 has given her views on "*spending quality time with my children*" with the aim to create memorable experiences with her baby while they grow up in a fun-filled atmosphere.

Theme 3: Mental and physical challenges, negative situations experienced during motherhood

While delving deep into this question, it has been found that young mothers have faced several challenges and negative situations during their motherhood that ranges from postpartum depression to stress, anxiety and chronic back pain. On the contrary, respondent 1

has shared her experience of dealing with "*struggles to get back into shape and feel like me again*" and she also shared her challenging experience of "*Balancing the demands of motherhood with school and work*", which in turn have exacerbated the pressure on them. On the same wave, the second respondent shared about the significant changes on her body that include "*stretch marks, weight gain, and a shift in my centre of gravity*". On the contrary, several negative situations were incurring from blatant judgments from others as a result of which the respondents had the feeling that "*Being a young mother, I felt that others often had preconceived notions about my abilities and judged me for my choices*". However, the scenario for others is even more complex, as respondent 3 experienced a range of physical and mental challenges during motherhood while she stated "*I had an emergency C-section, and the recovery process was much longer and painful than expected*". In addition to the postpartum depression, the continuous cycle of "*sleep deprivation, hormonal changes, and adjustment to a new routine was overwhelming*". Alternatively, respondent 4 asserted that "*Pregnancy and childbirth can be quite traumatic*" as she experienced extreme physical and emotional pain during that phase. As a young mother, she was unable to connect with her baby, however, she had undertaken therapy and support from her loved ones to get through the situation. The most common challenge of postpartum as informed by respondent 5 was "*It was difficult to get a full night's sleep with a Newborn constantly waking up throughout the night*". This had a significant impact on the emotional and mental well-being of the young mothers.

Theme 4: Challenges and complexities faced in College during young Motherhood and Impact on Studies

In interviews with the 5 respondents, it has been observed that the majority of them are college goers, however, unplanned pregnancies have created significant complexity in finding time to study and attend classes simultaneously while taking care of the child. Respondent 1

has indicated the financial constraint stating that "*Paying for tuition and textbooks, as well as the cost of childcare, can be difficult to manage on a limited income*". Consequently, motherhood at an early stage comes with the emotional challenges of feeling anxious, and guilty while leaving the child for long hours to attend the classes. Respondent 2 has shared her experience of juggling between "*academics with raising my child*". She added that "*As a young mother, I have a lot of responsibilities on my plate*", hence this could affect their academic abilities and extra-curricular activities. Alternatively, respondent 3 as a college student has informed that "*One of the biggest challenges I face is balancing my academic responsibilities with my parental duties*". She also added that "*Between classes, studying, childcare, and other responsibilities, it can be tough to find enough hours in the day to get everything done*". These challenging situations make academic life difficult for young mothers who may not feel a sense of belongingness in the academic community. Conversely, respondent 4 is not yet joined college, but she had plans to return to school in the future. She informed me that "*my focus shifted to providing for my child and ensuring their well-being*" while putting her education on hold for a while. Respondent 5 also opined similar viewpoints, however, she has been able to overcome this challenge by "*staying organized and planning my time carefully*".

Theme 5: Abandon faced by the folks (parents, relatives, peers, etc) due to pregnancy at youth

Most of the respondents have experienced the challenges and moments of feeling neglected and judged as all of them young mothers mostly in their adolescents that have led them to face negative comments and severe judgements. Respondent 1 informed that she "*was pregnant at a young age, I was worried about how my family and friends would react*", however, she dealt with the situation positively as she said, "*I've learned to focus on the positive support systems in my life*". Alternatively, the second respondent had experience

neglect and lack of support as she asserted that ***“my parents were initially disappointed and concerned when they found out I was pregnant”***. There were several instances when the young mothers were distanced by their friends and relatives which have been difficult for them to find a new support network. In contrast, respondent 3 has been grateful as she asserted ***“I have a supportive partner and close friends”*** who have been her support system throughout her pregnancy till her motherhood journey. On the other hand, respondent 4 has faced a critically difficult time as she opined her experience of ***“feeling neglected by my parents and peers when I got pregnant at a young age”***, she also added her parents and relatives have distanced themselves emotionally which has made her journey even more challenging. However, the responses obtained from the Respondent 5 were diverse from the above, as her experience was different in this aspect she stated that ***“I didn't feel neglected by my family or friends when I got pregnant at a young age”*** She had experienced a supportive family and strong network to over this challenging phase.

Chapter 5 Discussion

The results obtained from the interview responses have provided clear insights into the multifaceted challenges faced by young mothers while undergoing a transition between from adulthood to motherhood. Young mothers find it difficult to maintain a balance between their school/college, jobs or childcare due to the lack of enough assistance and guidance to establish themselves as an adult. Moreover, this transition has been emotionally taxing due to the feeling of being overworked, dissatisfied and anxious. The financial instability due to the lack of income resources is a major challenge for young mothers to afford childcare, healthcare, access education and provide the best possible life for their children (Nkhoma et al 2020). Besides the financial struggles that have been a prominent challenge for the young mothers, the grievances of giving up their hobbies, aspirations and social activities for the welfare of their children were indicative. In contrast, there are constructive opinions by the young mothers where they have learned valuable lessons in time management, efficient management of tasks, sense of love and fulfilment.

As young mothers, the foremost priority is focused on the safe, healthy and security of the children. This encompasses their access to wholesome food, healthy and secure shelter, high-quality medical treatment and vaccinations that fosters a safe environment for the newborns. The mothers are more concerned to address the emotional, physical and social needs of the children while making them feel loved, valued and supported. On the contrary, young mothers are also focused on prioritizing their personal growth and self-care, taking out time to pursue their interests, hobbies and continuation of their education and career. It has been believed that their positive attitude towards life will set a positive example for the children to follow, and instil a strong sense of family traditions and values in them.

In contrast, dealing with postpartum depression has been the most difficult challenge for young mothers. Besides the mental and emotional exhaustion, the women found it difficult to

get back into shape, sleep deprivation, chronic pain, stress, stretch marks, weight gain, etc. Such intensive transformations have taken a toll on their mental health and self-esteem as it takes a long time for them to embrace the new body. There are responses from young mothers who had C-Sections, hence the recovery process was much longer and painful for them and severe hormonal changes were associated with it. The negative situations are found to be ingrained in the social stereotypes and judgments against young mothers exacerbating their frustrations and feelings of guilt (Marvin-Dowle & Soltani, 2020). This has led to a difficult phase for them to cope with the emotions and restricted their abilities to connect with the child. Hence, it is evident that pregnancy and childbirth are often traumatic, especially for young mothers, which led them to undergo a lot of therapies and support to recover from the social stigma and negative experiences while adjusting to the new life as a mother.

While the majority of the young mothers were college goers when they became pregnant or gave birth to newborns, which has made them struggle with challenging situations. Besides facing the time constraint to study and attend regular classes, the situation has been exacerbated by the financial strains as they are unable to afford textbooks, tuition, and childcare costs that add up to their stress and anxiety.

Hence, it is evident that maintaining a healthy and fulfilling social life as a young mother is challenging, however, motherhood can also be rewarding with a strong supportive network and dedication. As young mothers, they face multiple responsibilities, hence prioritizing the time more efficiently is a requisite in such circumstances in order to keep a balance between academic responsibilities and parental duties. However, most of the young mothers shifted their focus to provide to childcare while putting their education on hold, because it is difficult to find take complete care of the child in between classes or find affordable and reliable childcare during class hours. Some mothers have shared their experiences of feeling anxious and guilty about leaving their children to attend their college or classes. In contrast, there are

some women who have continued to pursue their education despite all the challenges on getting full support from their family and friends that helped them to balance their responsibilities as a student and a mother so that they can create a better future for their children and themselves.

The pregnant or young mothers have faced neglect, lack of support, friends and relatives distancing and negative comments from the family that were discouraging and disturbing for them to lead a stable life. They have often felt isolated, and secluded from social events and conversations which is frustrating and challenging to find new and positive support systems. The worst experience shared by the respondents was the shocking reactions and disappointment of the parents on their news of getting pregnant at an early stage, which led them to distance themselves emotionally. In contrast, some women have full support from their family and partners which had made their pregnancy and motherhood journey much more convenient. However, young mothers have dealt with the challenges of feeling neglect, lack of support and emotional turmoil by prioritizing the wellbeing and needs of their children (Kiani, Ghazanfarpour & Saeidi, 2019). These women have emphasized connecting with others who face similar experiences through the parenting groups.

In conclusion, it can be summarized from the above results and analytical discussion that being a young mother has several challenges that get exacerbated by the social stigma and isolation from folks. However, the findings indicate that not all women are found to be fortunate to have strong support from their partners and family members; hence they have to navigate the best possible ways to overcome the obstacles and create a balance between motherhood and student. Pursuing a career and goals has been pointed out as equally essential to maintain their individual prosperity and cater to the well-being of children.

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