

# Experiences of Adolescents in their Maternal Role

Research Article

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## Article History

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## Abstract

**Introduction:** Adolescents during pregnancy experience psychological, emotional, anatomical, and physiological changes for which they are not prepared. They face different feelings between fear, helplessness, frustration, worry and fear of fulfilling a responsibility that they do not want.

**Objective:** To characterize the experiences of adolescent girls in their maternal role in a community in the state of Morelos, Mexico.

**Methodology:** Qualitative, phenomenological, narrative study in 6 adolescents between 15 and 19 years old, with children born between 1 and 3 months ago. A semi-structured face-to-face interview was applied in depth, with open questions, consistent with the narrative design. Discourse analysis was performed, obtaining categories and subcategories.

**Results:** Four categories emerged: Social representation of motherhood; Experiencing motherhood; Family Dynamics and Self-Realization. The challenges of motherhood in adolescence, the need for support and the importance of balancing family expectations, their own desires and the new responsibilities that motherhood brings are evident. They experience school failure related to the interruption of their education, the search for an identity and the difficulty of aspiring to a better future. They express the need for support and understanding at a crucial time in their lives. Intense emotions, expectations from others, and the struggle to maintain their own identity are just some of the realities that teenage girls face.

**Conclusion:** Motherhood at an early age is a highly complex phenomenon, where support and sacrifices are intertwined, creating a unique and profoundly transformative experience

**Keywords:** Adolescent Pregnancy, Life Experiences, Motherhood

## Introduction

Early pregnancy is a latent problem worldwide [1]. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the birth rate in adolescents aged

10 to 14 years in 2023 was estimated at 1.5 per 1000 women. In Latin America and the Caribbean this rate rises to 2.3 per 1000. Adolescent pregnancy tends to be more prevalent among people with less education or low economic status [2,3]. It is the result of the conjunction



of various social, cultural, economic and even political factors [4]. Its presence entails risks for the maternal-infant dyad due to immaturity in the biological, mental and social spheres in adolescence [5]. It negatively affects the social sphere of adolescents, reducing the possibilities of achieving higher education levels, limiting their autonomy, freedom, fulfillment and recognition, leading to serious social, economic and psychological conflicts [6].

Adolescents perceive pregnancy differently than adult women, they experience psychological, emotional, anatomical and physiological changes for which they are not prepared [7], which generates internal conflict of emotions, thoughts and behaviors based on an ambivalence between fear, helplessness, frustration and worry and the desire to fulfill a responsibility that they do not want [8].

Previous studies [9-11] show that how adolescents perceive pregnancy is related to three important aspects of their lives. On the psychological side, they may feel a mixture of emotions ranging from resignation to acceptance of their situation. Physically, it can be affected by complications during pregnancy or by the experience of an abortion. In the social environment, in which she can provide support, however, the existence of abusive or rejection behaviors towards the young pregnant woman is more frequent. Conditions in one of these areas have an impact on the others, affecting the general well-being of the adolescent.

Considering the importance of this problem, this research was car-

**Table 1:** Characteristics of the participants.

Participant	Age	Schooling	Environment familiar/dependence Economic	Age of your son	Live with	Who uses when need	Pseudonym
1	15	Primary	Mother	1 month	Mother	Mother	Rose
2	19	High school	Spouse	3 months	In-laws	Mother-in-law	Lily
3	16	High school	Parents/Husband	1 month	Parents	Mother	Margarita
4	18	High school	Spouse	1 month	In-laws	Mother/mother-in-law	Violet
5	16	High school	Mother	2 months	Mother	Mother	Sunflower
6	18	High school	Parents	3 months	Parents	Parents	Dahlia

Source: Authors' elaboration based on the stories of the adolescents.

**Table 2:** Categories and subcategories.

Category	Subcategory
Social representation of motherhood	Maternity Perception
	Personal experiences
	Experience of others
Experiencing motherhood	Fear and responsibility
	Family conflict
	Obtaining economic resources
	Internal struggle and the process of adapting to their new reality

ried out as a final project to obtain the master's degree in nursing, with the aim of characterizing the experiences of adolescents in their maternal role in a community in the state of Morelos, Mexico.

## Methods and Materials

A qualitative, phenomenological study of narrative design was carried out in 6 adolescents between 15 and 19 years old, with children born between 1 and 3 months ago who live in the rural community of Tetecala in the state of Morelos, Mexico. An in-depth semi-structured face-to-face interview was applied, with open-ended questions, consistent with the narrative design. Prior to the start of the interviews, the objectives and relevance of the project were explained to the participants in detail and in appropriate language, making it clear that they would not be judged or discriminated against. Discourse analysis was performed, obtaining categories and subcategories. The confidentiality of their information was guaranteed, their anonymity was maintained by assigning them a pseudonym and informed consent was requested.

The age of the adolescents ranged from 15 to 19 years. Her schooling was basic, from full primary to secondary level. All the participants manifested economic dependence on parents and husbands. The usual residence was at the home of their parents or in-laws, who are the people from whom they receive support (Table 1). Four main categories emerged with different subcategories (Table 2).

Family dynamics	Fear of family rejection
	Responsibility and expectations
	Parents' reactions
	Conflict between the aspirations of fathers and the reality of their daughters
Self-realization	School failure
	Disappointment and longing

## Social representation of motherhood

### Maternity Perception

The adolescents' expressions reflect their emotional and physical experiences in their role as mothers, highlighting two key aspects: the burden of responsibility and the difficulties of night care.

Adolescents show an affectation of responsibility: The phrase "*I was not prepared for so much responsibility*" suggests a surprise at the intensity of the demands that motherhood implies. This feeling occurs when the complexity and commitment required to take care of a child is underestimated or unknown.

On the other hand, the burden of responsibility in physical exhaustion manifests, as can be seen in the following phrase: "*take care of him day and night*", which emphasizes the constant and exhausting nature of this responsibility.

At the same time, you can notice how motherhood affects their physical and mental health, especially because of the lack of sleep they face when caring for their children. The phrase "*I don't sleep the same anymore*" clearly reflects this challenge. In addition, when the teen's mother steps in to help with the baby's care, it highlights how crucial it is to have family support. Motherhood is not a task that can be carried out alone; Often, a support network is needed to make the journey more bearable. It is also important to highlight how the fatigue they feel from breastfeeding and daily physical exertion impacts their overall well-being, showing that being a mother is a journey that demands much more than you sometimes imagine.

### Personal Experiences

In relation to personal experiences, the narrative clearly shows the emotions and concerns that adolescents experience when they become mothers.

Dalia, by saying "*I didn't think it would happen to me again*", reveals a mixture of surprise and a touch of fear at the idea of a new pregnancy. It's understandable, especially if in your first pregnancy your parents weren't aware. That experience can make you feel alone, like you're facing this challenge without the support you need.

For their part, Margarita and Rosa talk about the great responsibility they feel. By mentioning that they must be "*more responsible*" and that "*taking care of a baby is not a game of play*," they are acknowledging how serious this new role is. The arrival of a baby not only changes their routines, but also transforms their lives in a profound way, where commitment becomes essential.

In turn, Rosa shares her concern at seeing her baby "*very small*" when she was taken home. This moment is full of tenderness, but also of uncertainty, wondering if they will be able to take care of such a fragile being. It is a mixture of love and fear that defines the experience of being a mother, showing that motherhood is a path full of challenges for adolescent girls.

### Experience of Others

Other people's experiences offer valuable insight into what it means to be a mother. Margarita comments: "*I have friends who have gotten pregnant, and their parents were not angry/bothered with her.*" This

shows that although every story is different, sometimes family reactions can be supportive rather than reproachful. This contrast can lead Margarita to reflect on her own situation, highlighting the importance of having an understanding family environment at such decisive moments.

On the other hand, Rosa, Margarita and Violeta talk about how sacrificial it is to be a mother. When expressing, "*Being a mother is the most sacrificial thing*," they are acknowledging the deep commitment involved in taking care of a child. In turn, the phrase "*I already owe myself to my son*" highlights how their priorities have changed significantly.

### Experiencing Motherhood

The analysis of the expressions from a phenomenological perspective offers an understanding of the subjective experiences and perceptions that adolescents have about motherhood, especially in relation to the difficulties they face.

### Fear and Responsibility

The phrase of Rosa, Azucena and Margarita, "*I thought, how was I going to take care of him? If he is very small, I was afraid to carry him, I felt that I could hurt him*," reflects the deep fear and concern that accompanies the arrival of a newborn. This fear shows both the fragility of the newborn and the emotional burden felt by mothers. Questioning their ability to care for such a small being highlights the pressure they feel when taking responsibility for another's life.

On the other hand, the adolescents manifest a search for support and validation, which can be perceived in Violeta's expression "*when I go to the pediatrician, I ask him and the nurse, they know more than my mother-in-law*". This search for knowledge and professional support indicates a need for validation and security in her decisions as a mother. By placing trust in the pediatrician and nurse, it is evident that the search for a solid foundation on which to base the care of the newborn is evident, moving away from possible well-intentioned advice, but not always adequate.

Adolescent girls express sadness at the loss of their autonomy/freedom. In this way, Margarita and Dalia express it when they say: "*But when I have to go out, I have to tell someone to take care of it, I can't go out like I used to*". This change in their routines reflects the transformation in their identity and lifestyle. The need to plan and depend on others to care for their children can generate feelings of frustration and limitation, showing how motherhood alters their autonomy.

### Family Conflict

The situation to which motherhood leads them generates conflict in family interference and changes in family dynamics, which requires an adaptation to a new way of life. Violeta's experience, when she comments "*my mother-in-law gets involved in everything, she almost doesn't even let me take care of her*", highlights the complexity of family dynamics in parenting.

### Obtaining Economic Resources

Motherhood also affects the ease of obtaining economic resources, putting the adolescent in a dilemma between work and motherhood.



Dalia expresses an internal struggle that reflects the tension between the roles of mother and worker in her phrase *"That's why I want to work alone so that my baby grows a little more, now it's very difficult for me to leave him with someone"*, which highlights a conflict between her professional aspirations and her desire to be a mother.

### Internal Struggle and the Process of Adapting to their New Reality

The adolescents' expressions about motherhood reflect a deep internal struggle and a process of adaptation to their new reality.

## Family dynamics

### Fear of Family Rejection

Dalia mentions *"my parents got very angry, I thought they were not going to support me, because of what happened before."* This expression captures the fear they feel when facing a situation as significant as pregnancy. The anticipation of rejection and lack of family support indicates a sense of loneliness and vulnerability, which can intensify the emotional burden they already face as adolescents.

### Responsibility and Expectations

Dalia's statement, *"my mother does not want to take care of him, because it is my responsibility"*, reflects an internalization of the expectation that motherhood is a personal duty. This notion of responsibility can lead to feelings of isolation, as she feels she must carry the weight of the situation without the support she expected from her mother. Dalia's statement *"in the end it is my responsibility, my baby" and "as my parents say, now I have to take responsibility for my baby"* shows an acceptance of her new reality. This transition to motherhood implies a reconfiguration of their identity and the need to mature quickly. Margarita, Violeta, and Dalia's phrase *"he's up to me"* emphasizes the emotional connection and burden they feel in being responsible for another human being, which can be both scary and empowering.

### Parents' Reactions

The experiences of Rosa, Azucena and Margarita illustrate how parents' reactions can reflect their own expectations and fears. Margarita's response, *"my dad reacted worse, by telling him that throughout the pregnancy he did not talk to me!"*, highlights the pain and frustration that can arise from a lack of communication and support. This also highlights the difficulty of family relationships in times of crisis, where silence can be as painful as words.

### Conflict between the Aspirations of Fathers and the Reality of their Daughters

The narrative shows the conflict between the aspirations of the parents and the reality of their daughters. Margarita mentions *"my parents told me that they wanted something more for me, that's why they didn't want me to get pregnant so young"*. Parents may feel that pregnancy interferes with the promising future they had envisioned for them, which can increase pressure on teenage girls and lead to feelings of disappointment.

## Self-Realization

### School Failure

Early motherhood significantly affects the achievement of academic goals, generating the impression of being subject to school failure.

The expressions reveal the emotions and challenges adolescent girls face as they navigate between their own and their partner's educational aspirations and the new responsibilities that come with being a mother. Violeta's statement, *"my mother-in-law wanted her son to finish school"*, highlights the expectations that families have about education. This pressure can reflect not only a desire for academic success, but also a search for a better future.

## Disappointment and Longing

Likewise, it is a cause of disappointment and longing. Rosa, Dalia and Margarita share the disappointment when they say: *"I felt bad because I left school, I did want to continue studying"*, making clear the deep desire to continue with their education and the pain associated with the interruption of their plans. The feeling of failure can be overwhelming, as education is often seen as a path to personal and professional fulfillment. It highlights the importance of education as a means to empower young women in their new reality as mothers. Girasol mentions *"my parents want me to continue studying so that I am prepared for life, now that I am a mother."*

## Conclusion

The narrative offers an in-depth insight into the challenges of adolescent motherhood, revealing the need for support and the importance of acknowledging the struggles teenage mothers face in their day-to-day lives.

Her expressions reveal an internal struggle in which adolescents must balance family expectations, their own desires and the new responsibilities that motherhood brings. The perception of school failure is not only related to the interruption of their education, but also to the search for an identity that allows them to be responsible mothers and, at the same time, aspire to a better future. This highlights the need for support and understanding at a crucial time in their lives.

The analysis carried out opens a window to the knowledge of the complex emotions that accompany motherhood in adolescence, from surprise and responsibility to tenderness and insecurity, showing that each experience is unique and deeply personal.

It is thus concluded that motherhood at an early age is a highly complex phenomenon, where support and sacrifices are intertwined, creating a unique and profoundly transformative experience.

The results allow us to understand the emotions, tensions and transformations that adolescents experience when they become mothers, offering a deep and nuanced approach to the perception of motherhood from lived experience.

They also provide a rich and nuanced view of adolescent girls' perceptions of motherhood. They reveal both the emotional difficulties they face and the transformations in their identities and family relationships, highlighting the complexity of this process at such a critical stage of life.

Motherhood in adolescence is an experience rich in nuances. Intense emotions, expectations from others, and the struggle to maintain their own identity are just some of the realities that teenage girls face.

## Discussion

The perception of motherhood among adolescents is a deeply complex issue that goes beyond the simple narrative of being a mother. Through the participants' narrative, a world full of emotions, expectations, and challenges that shape their identity and daily lives is revealed.

When talking about motherhood, many adolescents express intense fear and a sense of responsibility, as well as the weight of the expectation of taking care of their baby alone. This burden can be overwhelming, especially at a time in their life where they are still figuring out who they are [12]. Adolescent girls express their fear of not being able to adequately care for their newborns, reflecting a genuine concern for the fragility of these little beings and for their own ability to be good mothers. This fear is experienced by adolescents when they become mothers, as they face a radical change in their identity and in their way of seeing the world.

Family dynamics play a crucial role in this experience [13]. Teenage girls prefer to seek advice from the pediatrician rather than their close





family members, which shows their need for support and validation. Sometimes, family relationships are not as supportive as you would expect, and this can make young women feel alone in their new role. Parents react in various ways, from rejection at first and acceptance when they see that it is not possible to change reality, which can be deeply painful [14]. A lack of communication and emotional support can intensify feelings of isolation, as if they are facing this challenge without help.

In addition to the above, adolescents face the pressure of balancing their new reality as mothers with the expectations of their families and their self-realization [15].

Although there are multiple contraceptive methods, on some occasions, they are not accessible to adolescents, with limited geographical, cultural and economic access, which has an impact on unwanted pregnancies, so it is necessary to emphasize education to prevent pregnancies at an early age, either in the school environment and in the dissemination of this education through non-formal means such as social networks or television aimed at men and women. Women and motivate the collective thought that pregnancy and its prevention is not an exclusive responsibility of women, but that because it is a social conflict men, women, family and society in general intervene.

## Limitations

The present study was conducted with adolescents from a rural community, with a limited number of participants. It would be advisable to carry out similar studies with a larger number of participants in different types of communities to obtain information that allows the issuance of prevention strategies for the beginning of sexual life at an early age, unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases to reduce these public health problems in the adolescent population.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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