

## **Pregnancy and Early Motherhood: Learning Experiences of Female Undergraduates of a Nigerian University**

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### **Abstract**

This study explored the pregnancy stories, issues and challenges, and lessons female undergraduates in Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife, Nigeria garnered from their lived experiences of pregnancy, early motherhood and studentship. The case study research design was used in this study. While the study population consisted of all female undergraduates of OAU who had experienced early motherhood, a sample of 12 participants was selected using purposive and convenience sampling techniques. Data obtained from participants using an in-depth interview were analysed using thematic analysis. The study revealed that student mothers' pregnancy and early motherhood were as a result of voluntary and involuntary sexual activities. They experienced challenges related with stress from juggling roles, financial difficulties, psychological trauma, lack of support from family members, social stigma and physiological changes. From the reflections and lessons garnered from participants' lived experiences, they learned to appreciate people, acquired parenting and multitasking skills, and had perspective changes resulting in spiritual awakening and questioning of past actions. Participants' learning was mainly acquired informally. The study concludes that participants have learned to forge ahead to achieve their aspirations despite the circumstances surrounding their pregnancy and the challenges they dealt with in their academic and motherhood experiences.

**Keywords:** Early motherhood, female undergraduates, student mothers, Learning experiences, informal learning

## 1. Introduction

The prevalence of pregnancies among adolescent/teenage girls is a phenomenon of global public health and social concern (Akombi-Inyang, Woolley, Iheanacho, Bayaraa & Ghimire, 2022; Bolarinwa, Tessema, Frimpong, Babalola, Ahinkorah & Seidu, 2022). According to Darroch, Woog, Bankole and Ashford (2016) cited in World Health Organisation [WHO] (2020), in developing regions, there are no less than 21 million occurrences of pregnancies among adolescents between 15 and 19 years old, while about 12 million of them actually give birth. In Nigeria, several studies have attested to the fact that females aged between 15 and 19 were sexually active and bearing children (Akombi-Inyang, Woolley, Iheanacho, Bayaraa & Ghimire, 2022; Bolarinwa, Tessema, Frimpong, Babalola, Ahinkorah & Seidu, 2022).

Most often, within the formal school setting, girls in the 15 to 19 years age range are found at the secondary and tertiary levels of education (Adetoun & Adesola 2011; Amadi, 2019; Elekeh, Enwereji, & Odina, 2021). In their pregnant state, there are two options before the pregnant adolescent/teenager- to keep the pregnancy or abort it. While findings by Adetoun and Adesola (2011) and Abiodun-Ajayi and Ajao (2022) indicate that some adolescents indeed opt for the abortion of unwanted pregnancies perhaps due to the health and socioeconomic consequences of early pregnancies and childbirth such as complications leading to death; stigma, rejection or violence by partners, parents and peers; school dropout as shown in WHO (2020), others however keep their pregnancies (voluntarily or involuntarily) and give birth thus launching into early motherhood.

This is against the backdrop of the Nigerian society's conception of motherhood. For example, Gbogbo, Ayanore, Enuameh and Schweppe (2018) observed that although motherhood was regarded as an experience often anticipated by women and/or the society they belonged to because it was one of the determinants of a woman's identity, it was however not often so perceived when motherhood occurred during adolescence which might have been adjudged to be ill-timed. For those who tow the path of motherhood, moving forward with their lives after childbirth, those who were either suspended or expelled for getting pregnant in secondary school get reintegrate into the school system and proceed for higher education, others who got pregnant at the tertiary level of education combine motherhood with academic rigours.

Bearing in mind the significance of education to girls and women as an entry point to other opportunities (Amos, Amoako, Antwi & Amoah, 2021) such as a means of empowerment against poverty, unemployment among others in contemporary Nigeria, the decision to combine motherhood with academics for these adolescents mothers comes at a cost. The purpose of this study is therefore to explore the lessons early mothers who are currently university undergraduates have garnered from their lived experiences of pregnancy, early motherhood and studentship with the following objectives in view. To:

- describe the circumstances that led to the pregnancy and early motherhood of student mothers;
- identify the issues and challenges student mothers dealt with as early mothers and students; and
- examine the informal learning participants have garnered from their lived experiences and the forms the learning took.

## **2. Relevant Literature**

The prevalence of teenage/adolescent pregnancies in Africa has caught the interest of researchers over the years. For instance, in a systematic review and meta-analysis study of the prevalence and determinants of adolescent pregnancy in Africa, Kassa, Arowojolu, Odukogbe and Yalew (2018) reported among other things that that nearly one-fifth of adolescents become pregnant in Africa. Focusing specifically on Nigeria while using a multi-level analysis to examine the spatial distribution and factors associated with adolescent pregnancy in Nigeria, Bolarinwa, Tessema, Frimpong, Babalola, Ahinkorah and Seidu (2022) discovered that adolescent pregnancy in Nigeria ranged from 0 to 66.67% while the highest proportion was found in the Northern parts of Nigeria.

Studies have equally focused on the factors and circumstances that led teenagers to unintended pregnancies and early motherhood within various contexts and settings within and outside Nigeria. Bolarinwa, Tessema, Frimpong, Babalola, Ahinkorah and Seidu (2022) reported that in Nigeria the likelihood of adolescent pregnancy was high among those who had sexual debut between 15 to 19 years among other factors, they also noted that employed adolescents (95%) were less likely to have adolescent pregnancy. Also, in a study of the experiences of adolescents

and young adults about teen pregnancy in Jos, Nigeria, Olorunsaiye, Degge, Ubanyi, Achema and Yaya (2021) found that among other factors, participants associated adolescent pregnancy with inappropriate behaviour and immaturity which are closely linked with the lack of sexual and reproductive health education and parental communication.

Results further revealed that sexual assault and rape also contributed to adolescent pregnancy. Situating their studies within the secondary school context, Amadi (2019); Elekeh, Enwereji and Odina (2021) identified that teenage pregnancy was influenced by peer pressure, mistakes during sexual activity, societal practices, poverty among others. On their parts, Adetoun and Adesola in 2011 reported that undergraduate students were engaged in illicit sexual relationships and inferred that this resulted in a significant number of unwanted pregnancies among them.

There have been studies that show that post pregnancy, adolescent/teenage mothers contend with different issues and challenges within their personal, socio-cultural and academic realities. For instance, from a study that focused on the impact of teenage pregnancy and early marriage on the psychosocial well-being of pregnant teenagers in Lagos State, Emeri and Olarewaju (2022) found that teenage pregnancy and early marriage was linked to the depression, poor social relationships, social stigma and low emotional stability of pregnant teenagers. Apart from this, other researchers have enquired into the challenges early mothers contend with.

For example, reporting the experiences of motherhood among young black undergraduates in reconciling competing roles at a South African University, Maisela and Ross (2018) indicated that female undergraduates contended with time management, childcare, social, emotional and financial concerns. To these challenges, they adjusted to align with their children's need. Also, a study which sought to understand the pregnancy, motherhood and future aspirations of adolescent mothers in KwaZulu-Natal revealed that although some adolescent mothers enjoyed support from their partners, others contended with denial and rejection of them and children by the fathers of their children. Participants' families' reactions to their pregnancy ranged from anger and disappointment to abandonment; the silent treatment and subsequently, acceptance and forgiveness.

These participants experienced psychological issues such as guilt, loneliness, anxiety, stress and had suicidal ideations. Furthermore, while these mothers aspired to complete their education, focus on their dream careers and contribute positively to their society, they still had difficulties

with financial and social stigmatisation (Govender, Naidoo & Taylor, 2020). Providing insights from a combination of experiences of pregnant adolescents and adolescent mothers' coping and transitioning into motherhood in the Hohoe Municipality of Ghana, Gbogbo (2020) revealed that these women had negative experiences of motherhood which affected their lives as they struggled with economic and financial challenges; contemplated unsafe abortion to deal with the stigma associated with having unintended pregnancies; contended with adjusting to the additional responsibility of caring and returning to school after child birth.

The series of experiences that the likes of pregnant teenagers/adolescents and teenager/adolescent mothers garner tends to trigger the acquisition of certain knowledge, attitudes, skills as well as having perspective changes which result in learning (Hrimech, 2005; Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). The concept of adult learning embraces formal, non-formal or informal learning processes which depends upon peculiarities related to the spaces where they occur, who benefits from it, the goals and objectives of teaching-learning, the period of learning and the timing, who learns from who (and the types of resources required), who controls the teaching-learning interaction (learning), the processes involved among others (Nafukho, Graham & Muyia, 2010; Mejiuni, Cranton & Táíwò, 2015).

Providing distinctions to the types of adult learning, Foley (2004), Hrimech (2005), Merriam, Caffarella and Baumgartner (2007) described formal learning as the learning which takes place in educational institutions with a defined curriculum which often leads to certification or some other form of qualification under the tutelage and control of teachers or educators; nonformal learning comprises organised activities provided outside educational institutions like from community organizations, cultural institutions, voluntary associations through workshops and other training activities that afford adults the means to meet a specific or momentary need for systematic instruction; while informal learning refers to the experiences of everyday living from which individuals learn.

The learning experiences garnered from pregnancy, early motherhood and studentship align with those acquired through informal learning.

### **3. Conceptual Framework for this Study**

The concept of informal learning is central to how participants described and reflected on their experiences. Informal learning takes place in daily life, within the family and community, at the workplace, and through the interests and activities individuals pursue (UIL, 2012 in Singh, 2015). Besides being experiential, informal learning is incidental and/or unstructured, non-institutional learning (Mejiuni, Cranton and Taiwo, 2015). It is constructed, co-constructed, or acquired new knowledge, understanding, skills or attitudes which people undertake whether consciously or unconsciously (Marsick and Volpe, 1999; Livingstone, 2000; Hrimch, 2005; Mejiuni, Cranton and Taiwo, 2015 and Mejiuni, 2019). As a conscious process, “the control of what, how, where, and when to learn rests with the learner”, while as an unconscious process, “the locus of control is diffused and the process usually does not involve teaching by persons specially designated as facilitators, instructors, or teachers” (Mejiuni, Cranton, & Taiwo, p. xxiv, (2015). Furthermore, Mejiuni, Cranton, and Taiwo (2015) projected informal learning to be of four types- tacit learning which is “the most ubiquitous form of unconscious informal learning. It unfolds mostly through living, socialization, and spontaneous apprehension of knowledge and information as part of everyday living” (xlili), incidental learning which describes the “learning that we are not aware of when it occurs but is acknowledged later on reflection upon incidents, practices, and processes, that we have participated in or witnessed.

It is a form of unconscious informal learning” (xlili), explicit learning which is a deliberate form of learning not “marked by the same level of deliberative intensity as self-directed learning” (xlii), and self-directed learning which is the learning that allows individuals make decisions about their own learning in formal, non-formal and informal contexts as occurring on a continuum. While tacit learning on this continuum depicts the most implicit form of informal learning, self-directed learning is the most explicit form of the four forms of informal learning. In Cranton, Taiwo and Mejiuni (2015), there are no limits to the experiences learned in informal ways because informal learning experiences interface with formal education/learning and non-formal education provision as well as other contexts and interactions not designed or structured as teaching-learning interactions. Furthermore, within informal learning, adults adopt a wide range of processes and strategies to learn including observation, trial and error, reflection (in and on actions), socialisation. Adults also learn informally through primary experiences (Femi-Aderinto, 2021).

#### 4. Methods of Data Collection

This is a qualitative study which adopted a case study research design. Since case study research explores an event or phenomenon to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life/natural context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident, (Crowe, Cresswell, Robertson, Huby, Avery & Sheikh, 2011; Yin, 2018), it is considered appropriate for this study.

The study setting was the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. The University has 13 Faculties and one College in which student mothers are registered in various undergraduate programmes of study. While the population consisted of all undergraduate student mothers of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, data was collected from a sample of twelve undergraduate early mothers who were selected using both purposive and convenience sampling techniques. The sample size of twelve participants was reached after saturation which Mason (2010) cited in Dworkin (2012) stated to be the most important factor to consider with respect to sample size decisions in qualitative research. Data were collected in August, 2019 through an audio-recorded in-depth semi-structured interview done with participants. Data obtained were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis.

#### 5. Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

The socio-cultural description of early mothers in this study are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Participants' Profile**

<b>Participants' Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Age and when Pregnancy occurred</b>	<b>Faculty</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>
Judith	17 (Part 1)	Administration	Single	Christianity	Igbo
Bola	15 (JSS3)	Education	Single	Christianity	Yoruba
Tolulope	15 (JSS 3)	Pharmacy	Single	Christianity	Yoruba
Abimbola	16 (SS2)	Agriculture	Single	Christianity	Yoruba
Kafidat	19 (NCE1)	Sciences	Single	Islam	Yoruba
Chioma	18 (SS2)	Social Sciences	Single	Christianity	Igbo

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Bolade	17 (SS2)	Law	Single	Islam	Yoruba
Adetola	18 (Part 1)	Arts	Single	Christianity	Yoruba
Yemisi	17(Part 1)	Environmental Design and Management	Single	Christianity	Yoruba
Olaide	19 (Part 1)	College of Health Sciences	Single	Christianity	Yoruba
Kumbi	16 (SS1)	Technology	Single	Christianity	Yoruba
Damilola	18 (Part 2)	Education	Single	Christianity	Yoruba

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Source: Field work, 2019

Table 1. provides information about participants’ pseudonyms, age and when pregnancy occurred, Faculty/College, marital status, religion and ethnicity. The participants were assigned pseudonyms for identification and for confidentiality. The table shows participants became mothers between 15 and 19 years old. While a half of them got pregnant and birthed children in secondary school (Junior Secondary [JS] and Senior Secondary [SSS] levels), the other half became early mothers at different levels at the tertiary institution (Parts 1 and 2; National Certificate in Education [NCE]). All participants are undergraduates in nine Faculties and one College in Obafemi Awolowo University and are single. In respect to religion, while 10 participants are Christians, the remaining two are Muslims. Also, 10 of them are Yoruba, and the remaining two Igbo. The terms teenagers, adolescents, early/student mothers, undergraduates are used interchangeably to refer to participants in this study.

***5.1. What are the circumstances surrounding student mothers’ pregnancy and early motherhood?***

The analysis of data showed that participants became early mothers as a result of voluntary and involuntary sexual activities.

*Voluntary sexual activity*

Eleven participants shared that the circumstances that surrounded their early motherhood experiences were as a result of voluntary sexual activity. Yemisi, who got pregnant as a Part One student at age 17 was not forced to engage in sexual relations because she admitted, “*it was a voluntary sexual experience.*” This finding tallies with those of teenage mothers in Libo-on,

Manzo and Manzo (2021) who identified that they got pregnant from curiosity and their willingness to have sex with their boyfriends. Despite the voluntary nature of their sexual engagements, participants' (Judith, Bola, Olaide, Kumbi, Damilola and Adetola) pregnancies were unplanned and unintended. For example, Damilola explained:

it was a mistake – it was not supposed to come that early –we were looking forward to having a family, but not that early, so when it happened, it was a shock but I was not ready to abort it because I had a supportive partner.

Judith also explained:

becoming an early mother wasn't planned; it was...one of the adventures that everybody...just wanted to have sex-it was my first sex, so with that I got pregnant and I didn't want to abort it, because I feel like, being a Christian, if I should abort, I've committed a sin, and I should give the baby coming a chance in life.

This shows that despite the unplanned and unintended nature of participants' pregnancies, they did not contemplate abortion. This finding tallies with those of participants in Olorunsaiye, Degge, Ubanyi, Achema and Yaya (2021) who did not view abortion as a first option and thus resulted in live births for possible reasons such as religious beliefs, fears of complications or possible death from the abortion, the social stigma and criminalisation of abortion in Nigeria.

Four participants namely: Adetola, Tolulope, Chioma and Abimbola, regarded getting pregnant as teenagers through voluntary sexual activity as fun, due to peer pressure and curiosity, and were without regrets. For instance, Adetola said, *"I didn't plan for it; it was a mistake... it was actually sexual enjoyment; it was actually fun"*. Tolulope engaged in sexual activities and eventually got pregnant due to the company of friends she kept and her curiosity. She explained:

it was because of peer influence...my friends in school then, they said they had boyfriends and they wanted me too to have one...so I thought I should belong; I wanted to feel among...I want to feel the definition of: "you'll be in the sky when you're having sex.

The results of this study align with the findings in Olorunsaiye, Degge, Ubanyi, Achema and Yaya (2021); Amadi (2019); Elekeh, Enwereji and Odina (2021) that adolescents and young

adults' pregnancies are associated with peer pressure, mistakes during sexual activity, inappropriate behaviour and immaturity which stems from a lack of sexual and reproductive health education. Equally, Adetoun and Adesola (2011) attested that female undergraduates' involvement in illicit sexual relationships might not be unconnected with the occurrence of unwanted pregnancies.

#### *Involuntary sexual activity-Rape*

The analysis showed that only one participant got pregnant in her teens as a result of rape. Her pregnancy was unplanned and unintended. Bolade narrated, "*I was actually raped...that day, some robbers came to our house, and I was raped by one of them together with one of my siblings, who died as a result, while I survived...I can never forget that day, never!*" This finding is congruent with Olorunsaiye, Degge, Ubanyi, Achema and Yaya (2021) that sexual assault and rape are a common cause of adolescent pregnancies in Nigeria. Additionally, results from a retrospective review of women's histories and traumatic experiences of rape revealed a strong relationship between women with history of sexual violence and their susceptibility to psychological distress sexual dysfunction such as anger and hatred, paranoia, stress and reexperience of grief from the unpleasant memories of the rape incidence (Labe, Amande, Terngu & Atsehe, 2021).

#### **5.1.1. Summary of the circumstances surrounding student mothers' pregnancy and early motherhood**

This study identified that the circumstances surrounding the pregnancy and motherhood of student mothers were majorly through voluntary and involuntary sexual activities. While nearly all, except one participant became pregnant through voluntary sexual activities laced with the quest for fun, adventure, inexperience about sexual interactions, curiosity, youthful exuberances and peer pressure which resulted in unplanned/unintended pregnancies, participants did not consider abortion. The only involuntary sexual activity that resulted in unintended pregnancy reported in this study brought about lingering and hurtful memories to the rape victim.

#### **5.2. Issues and Challenges Student Mothers dealt with as Early Mothers and Students**

Analysis showed that early mothers were confronted with stress from juggling roles, financial difficulties, psychological trauma, lack of support from family members, social stigma and physiological changes.

*Stress from juggling roles*

Tolulope, Judith, Olaide, Bola and Damilola expressed to have encountered stress in juggling selfcare with motherhood and academics rigours. For Tolulope who became a mother in JS3, at the age of 15, the journey of motherhood appeared lonely. She said:

It is not easy because you cater for yourself; nobody is helping you again, unlike what you have in the States, when teenagers get pregnant their parents can still be supportive; here in Nigeria you have to struggle: you cater for the baby by going to work and finding money to take care of yourself, the baby; clothing; feeding— so it's not really a good experience.

In addition to the challenge associated with childcare, Judith found the task of keeping up with her academics to be stressful. In fact, her cumulative grade point aggregate (CGPA) dropped by two points. She narrated:

it actually affected my academics...carrying a life inside you for nine months is challenging, and you had to read, breastfeed, buy clothes, buy pampers...and you know babies have switching moods; they might not sleep in the night –parenting at a very young age is very challenging...you had to cope with school – you yourself still need to have people that are parenting you, and you now become a parent, it was challenging!

Pampers referred to in Judith's narrative is a brand of baby diapers commonly sold in Nigeria. Unlike Judith who became a mother in Part One, Bola's education was truncated because she got pregnant in secondary school. Reminiscing Bola shared:

It really affected everything about me – my academics, I couldn't go to school for a while...until I gave birth and the baby started walking. It was really not funny because my classmates, they had already moved on. I started over the same class; it was not funny.

In association with slowing down the pregnant girl's education, Tolulope added, "*the guy is moving forward while the lady is there struggling.*" Focusing on childcare, Damilola realised that it behooves on any responsible mother to nurture her child when she said:

I knew I had to care for someone – it was not just me anymore in decision making, I had to think about the fact that I had a kid...my baby...breastfeed – all those things were quite challenging; but over time I got a hang of it; I got someone to assist me, but initially having to do all these things were just not easy.

The stress from combining studentship with motherhood is equally reported in Maisela and Ross (2018) where young black undergraduates in their experiences of reconciling competing roles at a South African University contended with time management and childcare. They therefore learnt to adjust their academic requirements to align with their children's needs in order to cope with their situation. Another example is shown in the stress participants, specifically those who became mothers in secondary school associated with how attending to pregnancy and childcare slowed down their education.

#### *Financial difficulties*

Judith, Bola, Abimbola, Kafidat and Yemisi disclosed that they experienced financial challenges as early mothers. Owing to the age participants got pregnant, ranging from 15 to 19, they were mostly dependent on their parents financially. Judith explained:

financially, it was challenging...I'm still depending on my parents, and me having a child is...err... it makes me want to give up, but then as time goes on, I saw that I had to just get myself involved in a lot of things apart from schooling.

Judith's indication of getting involved in a lot of things in her narrative meant that she sourced for means to sustain herself financially rather than solely depending on her parents. Similarly, Abimbola shared her experience as a pregnant 16-year-old SS2 student, "*I could not cope...I had...financial challenges, because I was not working, I depended on my parents for financial support whenever I needed anything.*" Having financial difficulties emerged from participants' experiences because they were young, dependent and mostly unemployed when they became

early mother. Similar experiences of financial challenges and concerns are reported among pregnant and adolescent mothers as well as student mothers in Maisela and Ross (2018); Gbogbo (2020).

### *Psychological Trauma*

All participants averred to have experienced various forms of psychological/emotional disturbances as a result of their pregnancy and subsequent early motherhood as a result of feeling ashamed, letting the family down, the denial of the paternity of child and religious guilt. Some felt left behind while others had suicidal thoughts. Speaking about the shame, Chioma shared, *“I was scared and a bit ashamed walking around with pregnancy; the neighbourhood looking at me, and then I was very young. I gave birth at 18, it was quite embarrassing then.”* Similarly, Adetola felt ashamed of herself and had low self-esteem to be the only pregnant girl in her class at 100 level. This made her to be constantly pensive and unable to concentrate on her studies. On Judith’s part, the feeling that she let her family down when she got pregnant weighed her down emotionally. She explained:

Although the person that got me pregnant accepted responsibility for it, but still, I was emotionally down. The reason was feeling like a disappointment to my family...having a baby out of wedlock and being so as a part one student! I was thinking about what people would say about me getting pregnant at 17!.

For Adetola and Tolulope, the denial of the paternity by the fathers of their children and their family members was emotionally traumatic. Adetola shared, *“the father of the child was irresponsible; he denied responsibility for the pregnancy; he left me alone and so, I was the only one that took up everything.”* Likewise, Tolulope averred, *“I went through trauma because the family of the guy said– their son is not responsible for the pregnancy.”* Similar results of emotional trauma are reported in Govender, Naidoo and Taylor (2020) where adolescent mothers contended with the denial of them and children by the fathers of their children and experienced psychological issues such as guilt, anxiety and stress.

In relation with spirituality, Bola was guilt-stricken about her pregnancy when she said, “*my Christian life was affected by having a baby out of wedlock, but then, God says, when you ask for forgiveness, your sins are forgiven. So, I still go to church with my baby, it was difficult at first.*”

The feeling of being left behind while her friends progressed academically was emotionally traumatic for Abimbola who said, “*...my friends were in school studying, I had to stay back home because of the pregnancy, the stress...I could not combine the two.*” Apart from the aforementioned emotional traumas experienced, participants like Kumbi and Bolade had suicidal thoughts due to the emotional stress they went through. Kumbi was full of regrets for getting pregnant in SS1 at 16 years old.

She said, “*As a Yoruba girl, getting pregnant at that time, was a hell of a thing- a shame! My parents were really angry. They sent me to stay with a family friend...I felt I should take my life.*” Similar to the above-mentioned, findings in Olorunsaiye, Degge, Ubanyi, Achema, and Yaya (2021) identified self-condemnation and guilt for humiliating family members as examples of the emotional toll of pregnancy on adolescent pregnant mothers.

Bolade was judged by friends and people who did not know the circumstances that surrounded her pregnancy. This resulted in self-blame and suicidal thoughts when she said, “*I hated myself that I looked beautiful to attract those thieves and couldn’t do anything when they raped me... at a point I felt like I should commit suicide.*” Findings in this study revealed that engaging in self-blame is a form of psychological trauma experienced due to rape. This is consistent with findings in Gbahabo and Duma (2021) on the lived experiences of women with tonic immobility after rape who constantly blamed themselves for their failure to defend themselves during the sexual violation.

#### *Lack of support from family members*

Bola, Kafidat and Kumbi did not have the needed support they anticipated from their family members during their pregnancy and/or after delivery. Bola’s family members were angry that she got pregnant out of wedlock, she shared her experience:

family members were not ready to help...they wanted to teach me a lesson, and it was not funny...especially in the first stage, I felt like killing myself – I felt like I should just run away from home; like I shouldn’t be seen among people. I felt like a disappointment to my family.

In Kumbi's case, her parents told her to forget about schooling during the period of her pregnancy. She explained their reasons, "*they told me...that what was I thinking? You're not married; the guy you're out with is not working; you guys are students! So, they told me to go and fend for myself.*" Showing that her parents' anger eventually subsided, she averred, "*they actually came back for me, but it was really annoying; they told me to go and stay with one of my family friends then.*" Analysis of data revealed the lack of support from participants' family members at some point during their pregnancy, birth of children and academic pursuits. Similar findings are reported in Govender, Naidoo and Taylor (2020) where family members' reactions to adolescent mothers' pregnancy and child birth ranged from anger and disappointment to abandonment, the silent treatment as well as acceptance and forgiveness.

#### *Social stigma*

Participants like Yemisi, Judith and Bolade experienced stigma from friends and the community because they got pregnant when they were not expected to. In Yemisi's case, she was deserted by her friends. Speaking about her experience from a second person point of view, she said, "*some of your friends will leave you because you're no more in their league.*" On their own part, Judith and Bolade had their fair share of stigma within their communities. Judith for example narrated that she was looked down upon but did not allow that weigh her down when she said, "*the joy that my baby brought to me made me to neglect all those talks...I would keep on pushing to make sure that I have a better life for me and my baby.*" Similarly, Bolade whom we would recall became an early mother as a result of rape narrated her experience:

I became a mother and was not prepared for it...all my friends neglected me.

At first, they never believed me when I told them I was raped. They thought I was just one wayward person. The society kept talking about me, poking their noses into my issue...some referred to me as 'after one', others said I had 'baggage.' They criticised me and turned away whenever they saw me with my child, and menn [a slang]...! I'm just glad I scaled through it.

While '*after one*' is a derogatory manner of referring to a woman who has birthed one child, '*baggage*' is a sarcastic way of referring to her child as an added responsibility. Additionally, the gruesome experience that led to Bolade's pregnancy did not only affect her, but her immediate

family members as well because apart from dealing with the loss of her sister, they had to relocate because of the shame and stigma they experienced. Bolade narrated:

To take the shame off my eyes, we had to relocate somewhere at a point. In fact, it was tough for my dad to cater for the family and for me being pregnant at that time, and considering the loss of my sibling that was also raped – everything coupled together – it was a very challenging time for all of us

Being stigmatised for teenage pregnancy or being family members of pregnant teenagers are experiences in tandem with findings in Mgbokwere, Esienumoh and Uyana (2015) who investigated parents' perception and attitudes towards teenage pregnancy in a rural community of Cross River State, Nigeria and reported that teenage pregnancy has devastating effects on both the girl and her parents. Apart from depicting parents' failure to fulfil their responsibility in their daughters' upbringing, it is a stigma to the pregnant teenager and her parents.

#### *Physiological changes*

Only Damilola found the physiological changes that occurred in her body due to pregnancy to be an issue. Speaking about her pregnancy, she said, *"it affected my physical looks; I was not the same slim girl, 'cos some things changed in my body after having the child, I felt unattractive."* This participant's expressed concern about her physiological changes after child birth is an affirmation to results in Roomruangwong, Kanchanatawan, Sirivichayakul and Maes (2017); Adelere, Jepchumba and Kunwar (2021) that women experienced significant physical changes like weight gain and body appearance in pregnancy and postnatal periods. As a result, body image dissatisfaction is pervasive with the possibility of leading to low self-esteem and interrupted self-confidence among mothers.

#### **5.2.1. Summary of the Issues and Challenges Student Mothers dealt with as Early Mothers and Students**

The summary of the issues and concerns student mothers dealt with are identified under the themes: stress from juggling roles, financial difficulties, psychological trauma, lack of support from family members, social stigma and; physiological changes. Results showed that participants alluded to being dependent on others such as parents for financial sustenance. They grappled with diverse forms of emotional trauma while contending with pregnancy, motherhood,

studentship, relationships and interactions (with self, other persons and God). Apart from this, results revealed that student mothers experienced a lack of familial support at some point in as a way to show their disapproval to them getting pregnant when they did. Similarly, they and their family members were stigmatised in the society as well. The study also revealed that some regarded the physiological changes that occurred in their body due to pregnancy as an issue of concern.

### **5.3. Reflections and Learning garnered from participants' lived experiences**

Participants shared the knowledge and attitudes (appreciate people), skills acquired (parenting skills, multitasking) and the changes in experiences (spiritual awakening, question past actions: self-assessment) they had from their lived experiences as student mothers, daughters, family members and community members.

In respect of knowledge and attitudes, participants' learning to appreciate people are described hereafter.

#### *Appreciate people*

Judith, Kafidat, Chioma learned to be grateful for those who stood by them when they became early mothers despite societal perceptions of getting pregnant or having a child as teenagers outside wedlock. For instance, Judith explained:

having a baby at an early age really involves a lot – it showed me the people that really like me; people that are ready to stand by me no matter how hard it is...I would say, I really appreciate my parents – even though it was a shame for them, they didn't push me out. I remember my mom told me: "You got pregnant; you'll carry that pregnancy to school, but after six – nine months, you're going to bring the baby back home; then I'll be in charge of the baby, and you'll make sure that you face your education squarely." I also had friends that stood by me to not give up. I have learnt to appreciate them.

Analysis of data showed that the above learning experience occurred through informal learning processes and realms such as interaction and socialisation with mother, parents and friends (incidental and tacit learning) and primary experience (incidental and tacit learning). Findings in Mgbokwere, Esienumoh and Uyana (2015) could perhaps give insights to why student mothers

who got pregnant as teenagers would appreciate those who supported them because in the study, teenagers who got pregnant outside wedlock were perceived as social deviants and a sign of parental failure. Furthermore, such teenagers were to be sent away from the family, have their education stopped or abandoned to the individual responsible for the pregnancy by their parents. Concerning skills acquired, participants learned to parent and multitask as early mothers. These skills are hereafter presented.

### *Parenting skills*

Participants shared to have garnered parenting skills from their lived experiences as student mothers. For the likes of Judith, Damilola, Abimbola, Yemisi, Bola and Olaide early motherhood had taught them to hone their skills in childcare. For example, Damilola who averred to have been a previously carefree person said:

I had to learn how to do some stuffs that had to do with babies. I never knew how to induce sleep; I had to suck my baby's nose when she had catarrh, something I would never do for anybody –I just had to learn those stuffs.

Commenting on learning to be responsible for her child, Kumbi said, *“when you have a child, the way you think as a single lady changes. Now, you have to think of your child...I have a child; someone I'm taking care of now.”* On her part, Adetola shared to have learned patience in parenting when she said, *“one thing I...learned from becoming a mother is that one needs to be patient; if you're not the patient type, you can even kill your child if care is not taken.”* Participants' informal learning about parenting ranged from incidental to tacit learning. For instance, a participant's learning to suck out mucus from a distressed child's nostrils, a feat she never imagined she could do before becoming a mother and learning patient as a result of motherhood fits Mejiuni, Cranton, and Taiwo's (2015) description of incidental learning. Results showed that participants had to acquire dynamics of parenting practices which are essential for them to relate with their children and meet their needs as mothers since findings in Mangeli, Rayyani, Cheraghi and Tirgari (2017) indicate that teenage mothers lacked sufficient knowledge and skills for successful maternal roles.

### *Multitasking*

Abimbola, Bolade and Yemisi averred to have learned to multitask in their capacity as mothers and students. Knowing the importance of allotting time to an array of tasks for her to do Abimbola shared:

Now, motherhood has taught me multitasking, because before I only focused on my academics: go to school, come back home; go to church, come back home, and that's all, but now I have to wake up early to bath my baby; I'll get dressed, take her to school; go to work, then go to classes, and when it's evening, I'll have to go to her school again to pick her up; go back home—that has really made me to multitask a lot.

Participants' informal learning to multitask is majorly tacit in nature. Tacit learning according to Mejiuni, Cranton, and Taiwo (2015) unfolds through living and spontaneous apprehension of knowledge and information as part of everyday living. Results indicating participants' learning to multitask to cope with their multiple roles lends credence to the assertion in Torres, Sangala, San Jose and Mortos (2020) that mixing motherhood with learning is a major dilemma for student mothers which prompts them to multitask as a coping strategy to manage time amidst their attempts to combine education, childcare and other social responsibilities.

With respect to changes in perspectives, participants experienced spiritual reawakening and questioned past actions in the course of their lived experiences as early mothers.

#### *Spiritual reawakening*

Although a Christian herself, a previously critical Chioma had a review of how she perceived zealous Christians when she said, "...before I got pregnant, there were a set of people—these 'S.U.' (Scripture Union) – I used to see them as bullshit, but when I became pregnant, I became an SU myself because I would say I got closer to God." S.U. is a popular sarcastic appellation for born-again Christians in Nigeria due to their high moral and religious standards assumedly influenced by the Scripture Union Organisation (Ikegbule, 2016). From Chioma's pregnancy experience, she had a spiritual reawakening to be closer to God and not be judgemental of fervent Christians.

#### *Question past actions: Self-assessment*

Student mothers like Judith, Bola, Tolulope, Chioma, Bolade, Adetola, Yemisi, Olaide, Kumbi and Damilola had at some point questioned their previous actions which resulted in becoming mothers in their teen years. Contextually, the outcome of participants' self-assessment was that of regret for their actions and inactions. For example, Bolade bitterly said:

I should have killed that stupid robber that raped me because...I was 17! I had a lot of plans...I had a lot of desires... I was in SS2, for crying out loud! By the time I went back to school, they couldn't take me back in SS3, so I had to repeat that year. If I had to change time, I wouldn't want to have that child.

Similarly, Bola averred about her experience:

I would have remained a virgin (laughs). I wouldn't have had sex, had a boyfriend at a tender age because it affected me...the pregnancy was a mistake... I regretted it. The father of the baby wasn't supportive. That was why I said –I regretted it; he didn't support me. In fact, he even ran away; it was what made my family members to be so, so disappointed in me and they felt they couldn't trust me again.

On their parts while, Olaide who is now in part four was full of regrets due to the stress she went through especially in her years one and two as a student mother, Kumbi was indignant of her actions because of the enormity of shame she faced being pregnant in secondary school. The above- examined learning experiences resulting in spiritual reawakening and questioning of past actions and inactions are experiential and transformative. Transformative learning according to Mejiuni, Cranton, and Taiwo (2015) is described as the learning that results from critical reflection by learners which leads to behavioural changes in them; challenges their previously held beliefs; and cultivates better reasons for acting.

### **5.3.1. Summary of Reflections and Learning garnered from participants' lived experiences**

Results of analysis of data showed that participants had garnered knowledge and attitudes to be appreciative of those who cared for them despite the general disapproval for having a child

outside wedlock. The experiences of motherhood and studentship spurred participants to acquire skills in parenting to be physically, mentally and emotionally ready to care for their young ones despite their inexperience. They also learned to multitask in order to effectively balance motherhood with academic demands and other social responsibilities. Apart from these, early mothers had perspective changes that resulted in spiritual reawakening which drew them closer to God and further refrained them from being judgemental of spiritually conscious Christians. Furthermore, they learned to question their previous actions through self- assessment which resulted in regrets of their actions and inactions. These learning experiences are acquired through various forms and processes of informal learning. All these experiences were helpful to manage early motherhood, academic rigours amidst other social responsibilities for participants. These results are helpful for women learning literature and could be important reference points and content for family life education.

## **6. Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study concluded that participants have learned to forge ahead by acquiring knowledge, attitudes and skills as well as had perspective changes to achieve their aspirations despite the circumstances surrounding their pregnancy and the challenges they dealt with in their academic and motherhood experiences.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that:

1. Social awareness be raised on the different circumstances that result in teenage pregnancies thus revealing the devastating effects of assuming that all teenage pregnancies are due to waywardness.
2. While risky sexual behaviours should be discouraged among young teenagers, efforts should be made to rehabilitate and reintegrate pregnant teenagers into society.
3. Given the number of responses of participants to unintended pregnancy, it is necessary to intensify sexual and reproductive health education, which is a content area of family life education among teenagers and young adults in secondary schools and universities.
4. Society should not be judgemental of the manner with which pregnant teenagers, early mothers and their immediate family members deal with the occurrence of teenage

pregnancy and early motherhood through sensitisation about effects of sexual abuse such as rape which could result in emotional trauma and unwanted pregnancy.

5. Student mothers could create or join support groups to better cope with academic rigours.
6. Student mothers are advised to explore child care services available on campus to better manage academic rigours and in institutions where these services are not available, University management should consider having one.
7. Other early mothers should be encouraged to pursue higher education despite their initial setback of unplanned pregnancy and motherhood.

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