

Against all odds: a qualitative exploration of how adolescent mothers become career women

by

Vincent Ngafeeson

B.S., Oklahoma Baptist University, 2020

M.S., Oklahoma Baptist University, 2022

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Health and Human Science
College of Applied Human Science

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2025

Abstract

Background: Adolescent motherhood presents significant challenges, including socio-cultural, economic, systemic, and educational barriers that can impede long-term success. Despite these obstacles, some adolescent mothers transition into successful career women. Understanding how these women overcome such barriers is important for developing strategies to support current and future adolescent mothers.

Objective: This study explored the trajectories of career women who were once adolescent mothers, focusing on how they found the motivation to overcome various barriers and achieve career success. It sought to identify common themes and strategies that can inform support programs for adolescent mothers.

Methods: This study employed a qualitative research design rooted in a phenomenological approach. Five participants who became mothers during adolescence and are now regarded as career women were recruited through purposive sampling. Data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted via Zoom. The interviews focused on participants' experiences, challenges, sources of motivation, and support systems. Data was analyzed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to uncover themes and patterns.

Results: The interviews produced three main themes: *Unyielding Resolve*, *Resourcefulness and Strategic Prioritization*, and *Urgency as a Catalyst for Personal Growth and Change*. These themes highlight the participants' determination, strategic efforts, and proactive approaches to personal development.

Conclusion: The study sheds light on the remarkable journeys of adolescent mothers who have successfully transitioned into career women. The findings underscore the crucial role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, as well as the significance of relatedness, autonomy, and competence in the career development of adolescent mothers.

Against all odds:
a qualitative exploration of how adolescent mothers become career women

by

Vincent Ngafeeson

B.S., Oklahoma Baptist University, 2020
M.S., Oklahoma Baptist University, 2022

A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Health and Human Science
College of Applied Human Science

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

2025

Approved by:
Major Professor
Dr. Jared Durtschi

Copyright

© Vincent Ngafeeson 2025.

Abstract

Background: Adolescent motherhood presents significant challenges, including socio-cultural, economic, systemic, and educational barriers that can impede long-term success. Despite these obstacles, some adolescent mothers transition into successful career women. Understanding how these women overcome such barriers is important for developing strategies to support current and future adolescent mothers.

Objective: This study explored the trajectories of career women who were once adolescent mothers, focusing on how they found the motivation to overcome various barriers and achieve career success. It sought to identify common themes and strategies that can inform support programs for adolescent mothers.

Methods: This study employed a qualitative research design rooted in a phenomenological approach. Five participants who became mothers during adolescence and are now regarded as career women were recruited through purposive sampling. Data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted via Zoom. The interviews focused on participants' experiences, challenges, sources of motivation, and support systems. Data was analyzed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to uncover themes and patterns.

Results: The interviews produced three main themes: *Unyielding Resolve*, *Resourcefulness and Strategic Prioritization*, and *Urgency as a Catalyst for Personal Growth and Change*. These themes highlight the participants' determination, strategic efforts, and proactive approaches to personal development.

Conclusion: The study sheds light on the remarkable journeys of adolescent mothers who have successfully transitioned into career women. The findings underscore the crucial role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, as well as the significance of relatedness, autonomy, and competence in the career development of adolescent mothers.

Table of Contents

Dedication	viii
Preface.....	ix
Chapter 1 - Statement of the Problem.....	1
Background	1
Significance of the Study	2
Socio-Cultural Barriers	3
Economic Barriers	3
Systemic Barriers	4
Educational Barriers.....	4
Motivation and Support Systems	4
Chapter 2 - Literature Review.....	6
Relevance of SDT to the Current Study	10
<i>Teenage Mothers and Motivation</i>	11
<i>Teenage Mothers and Intrinsic Motivation</i>	13
<i>Teenage Mothers and Extrinsic Motivation</i>	15
Cultural Effects on Teenage Mother Experiences	16
Chapter 3 - Method	20
Research Design.....	20
Participants.....	20
Ethical Considerations	23
Data Collection	23
Data Analysis	23
Validity and Reflexivity.....	25
Chapter 4 - Results.....	26
Unyielding Resolve.....	26
Resourcefulness and Strategic Prioritization	33
Urgency as a Catalyst for Personal Growth and Change	39
Chapter 5 - Discussion	44
Limitations	47
Implications.....	48

Conclusion	50
References	52
Appendix A -	63

.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my lovely mother. Your journey from teenage motherhood to a career woman has been nothing short of extraordinary. Your strength, resilience, and unwavering dedication have not only shaped your own life but has also profoundly impacted the lives of your six children. You have raised us to be successful, compassionate, and driven individuals, and for that, I am eternally grateful. Your love, sacrifices, and tireless efforts have been the foundation of this project.

Preface

This research would not have been possible without the support and guidance of many individuals. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my professors, Dr. Jared Durtschi, Dr. Kristin Anders, Dr. Michelle Toews, and Kristen Kremer, whose expertise, encouragement, and invaluable feedback have been instrumental throughout this journey. Their dedication and commitment to my work have been a source of inspiration and motivation.

I am profoundly grateful to the 5 participants who generously shared their time and personal experiences with me. Your openness and willingness to participate in this study have provided rich insights and depth to this research. Each of your stories have contributed significantly to understanding the journey from teenage motherhood to successful career women.

I would also like to thank my family and friends for their unwavering support and encouragement. Your belief in me has been a constant source of strength.

Lastly, I extend my appreciation to everyone who has supported me in any capacity during this research. Your contributions, no matter how small, have been greatly valued.

Thank you all for making this research possible.

Chapter 1 - Statement of the Problem

Adolescent motherhood is a significant social issue affecting many young women's lives worldwide. In 2022, the Center for Disease Control reported 145,313 births to teenage mothers in the United States, with nearly 30% living below the poverty line, and about 20% experiencing major depressive episodes, and being more likely to struggle with anxiety and other mental health issues. Though adolescent pregnancy rates have steadily declined over the past few decades in the U.S., the challenges faced by teenage mothers remain profound (Modesto, 2020). These young women often encounter socio-cultural, economic, systemic, and educational barriers that can impede their ability to achieve long-term success. Despite these obstacles, the U.S. Census Bureau (2023) shows that some adolescent mothers transition into successful career women, classifying them as middle-class. Understanding how these women overcome such barriers is necessary for developing strategies to support current and future adolescent mothers in achieving similar success.

Background

The transition from adolescent motherhood to career success is fraught with challenges. Adolescent mothers are more likely to experience interrupted education, limited employment opportunities, and socioeconomic disadvantages (Kumar & Huang, 2021). These factors can create a cycle of poverty and limit prospects for both the mothers and their children (Watts et al., 2015). However, some adolescent mothers defy these odds and build successful careers, providing a valuable opportunity to learn from their experiences. The existing literature on adolescent motherhood primarily focuses on the adverse outcomes associated with teenage pregnancy, such as lower educational attainment and higher rates of poverty (Maslowsky et al.,

2021). Although these studies highlight important issues, there is a gap in the research regarding the success stories of adolescent mothers who become career women.

The present study is focused on filling this gap by leaning on the stories of career women today who were once adolescent mothers, and uncovering how they developed the motivation to overcome the socio-cultural, economic, systemic, and educational barriers that constantly stand in the way of adolescent moms. The goal is to explore their trajectory from when they became adolescent moms to when they became career women. The term ‘career woman’ is defined in this study as an individual who has achieved a steady and fulfilling employment, ensuring a stable income that allows her to provide for her family. She has also attained a college degree, demonstrating her commitment to education and personal growth. The study employs a qualitative design using a phenomenological approach to identify and develop common themes that run across this population when they embark on building a career. The study focuses on participants’ unique experiences as once single mothers and now career mothers, while attuning to shared components (common themes) that played significant roles in helping them develop their careers. The research questions guiding this study are:

Question 1: How did autonomy, competence, relatedness help foster motivation among adolescent single mothers in becoming successful career women while being effectively involved in the lives of their children?

Question 2: How did adolescent single mothers overcome the barriers that single mothers face in building a career?

Question 3: What motivating factors propel adolescent mothers to overcome the social, economic, cultural, and systemic barriers that block them from becoming career women?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform policies and programs aimed at supporting adolescent mothers. By understanding the trajectories of successful career women who were once adolescent mothers, policymakers, educators, and social workers can develop targeted interventions that address this population's specific needs and challenges (Harding et al., 2020). This study also aims to shift the narrative around adolescent motherhood from inevitable disadvantage to potential and resilience. By identifying how others have changed the narrative for themselves, this study gives useful tools to professionals and teenage mothers who are seeking to break socio-cultural barriers, economic barriers, systemic barriers, and educational barriers for career development.

Socio-Cultural Barriers

Adolescent mothers often face significant socio-cultural barriers, including stigma and discrimination (Ahorlu et al., 2015). Society frequently views teenage pregnancy as a failure, leading to negative stereotypes and reduced support from family, friends, and the community (Kumar & Huang, 2021). These socio-cultural barriers can diminish the self-esteem and motivation of adolescent mothers, making it difficult for them to pursue educational and career opportunities. Understanding how successful career women navigated these socio-cultural challenges can provide valuable insights for current adolescent mothers.

Economic Barriers

Economic barriers are another major challenge for adolescent mothers. Many young mothers struggle with financial instability, which can limit their access to education and career opportunities (Senkyire et al., 2022). The cost of childcare, healthcare, and other necessities can be overwhelming, especially for those without a robust support system (Watts et al., 2015). This

study explores how career women who were once adolescent mothers managed to overcome these economic barriers and achieve financial stability.

Systemic Barriers

Systemic barriers, such as inadequate access to education and healthcare, also play a significant role in the lives of adolescent mothers (Kumar & Huang, 2021). Educational institutions may lack the resources or policies to support young mothers, leading to higher dropout rates and limited career prospects (Maslowsky et al., 2021). Similarly, healthcare systems may not provide adequate support for the unique needs of adolescent mothers and their children (Harding et al., 2020). By examining the experiences of successful career women, this study aims to identify strategies for overcoming these systemic barriers.

Educational Barriers

Educational attainment is a critical factor in the career success of adolescent mothers. Many young mothers face interruptions in their education due to pregnancy and childcare responsibilities (Maslowsky et al., 2021). These interruptions can impact their career prospects and earning potential (Watts et al., 2015). This study will explore how successful career women continued their education and achieved their career goals despite these challenges.

Motivation and Support Systems

A key focus of this study is understanding the sources of motivation and support that helped adolescent mothers become career women. Support systems, including family, friends, mentors, and community organizations, can provide the emotional and practical support needed to overcome barriers (Harding et al., 2020). Personal traits such as resilience, determination, and

self-efficacy are important to success (Reading, 2010). This study will examine how these elements contributed to the participants' journeys from adolescent motherhood to career success.

In conclusion, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how career women who were once adolescent mothers overcame various barriers to achieve their current success. By qualitatively exploring the narratives of 5 women, this research seeks to identify common themes and strategies that can inform support programs for current and future adolescent mothers. The findings from this study have the potential to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of adolescent motherhood and to promote policies and interventions that support the career aspirations of young mothers.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Teenage pregnancy and childbirth are substantial transitional events in a teenager's life that encompass deep and lasting behavioral and experiential shifts (Mollborn, 2017). Among the industrialized Western countries, the United States stands as the number one country with the most teenage pregnancy (Smith et al., 2018). Though there is still a staggering number of teenage pregnancies across the U.S., research has shown that teenage pregnancy has been on a decline in most parts of the country (Powers et al., 2021). In 2022, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the teen birth rate was 13.6 births per 1,000 females aged 15 – 19 years old, down from 14.4 in 2021. This decline is seen as part of a broader trend observed in the past few decades (Canter et al., 2024). Though there is a significant decline in adolescent pregnancies across the country, the effects of adolescent pregnancy among adolescent mothers remain a concern.

From an economic standpoint, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that women's participation in the workforce has increased steadily from 43 percent in 1970 to 59 percent in 2004 (Cabrera, 2007). However, teenage mothers may struggle more with workforce participation given their unique context. Although the United States has experienced in the recent decade an increase in the percentage of teenage mothers who complete college and have a job by age 29, this increase, both in education and earnings, is less significant when compared to individuals who delayed having children until later in life (Pirog et al., 2018). A longitudinal study suggested that teenage mothers of recent decades are more likely to end up as single parents and poor than adults who were teenage mothers in the 1990's (Driscoll, 2014). Moreover, research points to the idea that delayed motherhood leads to better education and more earnings, and intentionally timing when to become a parent is important (Abele & Spurk,

2011; Miller, 2011). The complexity of experiencing early motherhood and building a career cannot be overstated; even for adult women in stable relationships, there are notable challenges. There is tension between motherhood and employment, such that motherhood often slows down career progress, and women with children tend to have more career stoppages than those without children (McIntosh et al., 2012; Metz, 2005). For teenage mothers, it is often a battle between childcare and pursuing a career. A comprehensive analysis by the National Institute of Justice (2024) found that adolescent mothers often struggle to find stable employment due to the dual responsibilities of childcare and work. This struggle is compounded by the lack of affordable childcare options, which forces many teenage mothers to choose between working and caring for their children. Seeing how complicated it is for adult women with children in stable relationships, teenage mothers clearly face more challenges in pursuing a career.

Teenage mothers often face significant economic disadvantages that can have long-lasting effects on their lives and their children (Briggs et al., 2007). Research indicates that adolescent mothers are more likely to experience lower educational attainment levels, directly impacting their earning potential (Jakubowski et., 3013). According to a study by Wall-Wieler and colleagues (2019), children born to adolescent mothers generally perform more poorly on school readiness assessments, which can perpetuate a cycle of poverty across generations. This lack of educational achievement limits job opportunities and earning potential, making it difficult for teenage mothers to achieve financial stability. Teenage mothers face social and structural factors that also influence their economic disadvantages. A study by Briggs and colleagues (2007) emphasized that many teenage mothers often come from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, which exacerbates their financial struggles. These mothers are more likely to live in poverty, have limited access to healthcare, and face housing instability. The combination of

these factors creates a challenging environment that can easily beat down motivation and increase the feeling of apathy. In this qualitative study, we focus on how career women who were once teenage mothers developed motivation when faced with the challenges adolescent mothers face.

Adolescent mothers also face significant psychological issues including suicidal ideation, guilt, loneliness, anxiety, and stress (Govenda et al., 2020). A study published in *Psychology and Education: A Multidisciplinary Journal* found that financial difficulties, social stigma, and family conflicts are prevalent stressors among adolescent mothers (Apas, 2023). These challenges are compounded by the lack of adequate support systems, which can lead to feelings of isolation and helplessness and further exacerbated by the societal expectations and pressures to balance motherhood with personal aspirations and educational goals (Pottinger et al., 2023). The transition to motherhood during adolescence can also affects the psychosocial development of these young women. The developmental stage of adolescence is critical for identity formation, and the added responsibility of parenting can disrupt this process, and such disruption can lead to difficulties in establishing a stable sense of self and managing the emotional demands of parenting (Apas, 2023). However, coping mechanisms and support systems can play a crucial role in mitigating these psychological challenges. Effective coping strategies, such as seeking social support and engaging in positive self-care practices, can significantly improve the mental health outcomes for adolescent mothers (Rea & Cox, 2021). By fostering a supportive environment, these initiatives can help adolescent mothers navigate the complexities of their dual roles and enhance their overall well-being

Theoretical Framework: Self-Determination Theory

In this study, we use self-determination theory (SDT) for our theoretical framework in conceptualizing, developing, and analyzing the study. SDT is a comprehensive framework for understanding human motivation, particularly the factors that promote autonomous motivation and psychological well-being. Developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, SDT posits that human beings have innate psychological needs essential for growth and well-being: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2017). The theory focuses on understanding how humans find motivation to pursue a dream, change a behavior, achieve a goal, or do something different with their lives (Teixeira et al., 2012). Two important concepts hold the theory together: intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. SDT is a theoretical framework that outlines the factors facilitating the interactions between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

Extrinsic motivation highlights external and social factors that motivate humans to do something, whereas intrinsic points to that internal drive towards accomplishment. However, they are not mutually exclusive; in most circumstances, the interaction of the two forms of motivation drives behavior (Deci et al., 2017). Three basic psychological needs are essential for fostering the human intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. The first, autonomy, is the need to feel in control of one's own behaviors and goals. Autonomy involves acting in harmony with one's integrated self, which means that actions are self-endorsed and aligned with personal values and interests (Deci & Ryan, 2017). The second, competence, is the need to gain mastery of tasks and learn different skills. Competence involves feeling effective in one's interactions with the environment and experiencing opportunities to exercise and express one's capacities (Ryan & Deci, 2017). The third, relatedness or connectedness, is the need to feel a sense of belonging and attachment to others. Relatedness involves developing close and intimate relationships with others and feeling connected to the social world (Vansteenkiste & Ryan, 2013).

SDT has been applied in various domains to understand and enhance motivation and well-being. SDT has been used in educational settings to promote student engagement and learning by supporting students' autonomy, competence, and relatedness. For teenage mothers, these principles are equally relevant. Research indicates that when teenage mothers perceive their educational environment as supportive of their autonomy and competence, they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to continue their education and improve their academic performance (Reeve, 2016). For example, providing teenage mothers with choices in their learning activities and offering positive feedback can enhance their sense of autonomy and competence, which are critical for their educational persistence and success (Jang et al., 2010). SDT has been applied in the workplace to improve employee motivation and job satisfaction by supporting psychological needs (Landry & Whillans, 2019). For teenage mothers transitioning into the workforce, opportunities for autonomy, skill development, and meaningful social interactions are important. Organizations that provide these opportunities can enhance the intrinsic motivation of teenage mothers, leading to greater job satisfaction and career advancement (Gagné & Deci, 2005). For instance, allowing teenage mothers to have a say in decision-making processes and offering professional development opportunities can significantly impact their career trajectories. SDT has also been applied in health contexts to promote healthy behaviors and well-being. Health practitioners who adopt a patient-centered approach and involve teenage mothers in decision-making can enhance their motivation to engage in healthy behaviors, which is essential for long-term success (Ng et al., 2012). This shows that in the case of teenage mothers, interventions that support their autonomy, competence, and relatedness can effectively promote behaviors that contribute to their overall well-being and ability to balance motherhood with career aspirations.

Relevance of SDT to the Current Study

For the current study, SDT is particularly important because it addresses the critical role of motivation in building a career. The theory helps focus on factors that increase the likelihood of teenage mothers being able to build successful careers. Like most other goals in life, building a career is deeply intertwined with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. This study theorizes that motivation—whether its presence or lack thereof—plays a significant role in understanding how teenage mothers move from one stage to another in their career development. The two key concepts of SDT, intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, and the three basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) will guide this study in understanding how individual factors (such as personal resilience and self-efficacy) and external factors (such as support systems and educational opportunities) shape the career paths of teenage mothers. By applying SDT, this research aims to uncover the motivational dynamics that enable teenage mothers to overcome socio-cultural, economic, systemic, and educational barriers, ultimately leading to career success.

Teenage Mothers and Motivation

The intersection of teenage motherhood and motivation has been a focal point of scholarly research over the past decade. Several studies have identified key factors that influence the motivation of teenage mothers. Parental support, particularly autonomy support, is central in enhancing academic motivation among adolescents. When teenage mothers receive support that fosters their independence, they are more likely to be motivated to pursue their educational goals (Çelik, 2024). Research has also explored various strategies to support and enhance the motivation of teenage mothers. Providing context-specific school and community-based programs has been shown to promote resilience and a positive attitude toward degree completion (Machado & Schwab, 2022).

Teenage mothers often encounter numerous challenges that can hinder their motivation. Machado and Schwab (2022) highlighted how teenage mothers face stigma, expulsion from school, and financial instability, which can significantly impact their motivation to continue their education. These challenges are compounded by parenting responsibilities, which can lead to increased stress and decreased time for academic pursuits. Moreover, the literature indicates that teenage mothers often experience a lack of social support, which can further diminish their motivation. Masud et al. (2019) found that higher socioeconomic status and parental support were associated with better academic performance in adolescent students. Teenage motherhood demands teen parents to grow emotionally, socially, and economically rapidly, (Chohan & Langa, 2011). As they grapple with abandonment from close friends and often their baby's father, the guilt of disappointing their family, the responsibility of bringing up their child, money, education, and finding a job immediately become priorities, but research shows that it takes extra motivation to finish a high school, enroll in college, and secure a well-paid job as a parent (Akella & Jordan, 2015).

Research has also shown that teen parents disproportionately battle with anxiety and depression (Hodgkinson et al., 2014), and health has a significant impact on motivation as healthier teens have been known to perform better in school than less healthy teens (Basch, 2011). Also, given that there is a strong positive correlation between self-efficacy and motivation (Van Dinther et al., 2011), and there is a significant relationship between teen pregnancy and poor self-esteem, especially among teen mothers with high depressive symptoms (Park & Crocker, 2012), motivation can be a tough character to build among this population. However, some adolescent mothers recognize the significant changes motherhood brings to their lives and

their perception and attitude towards motherhood over time (Ospina-Romero & Pardo-Torres, 2024), which could positively affect motivation.

Teenage Mothers and Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation can be defined as a system within humans that “mobilizes conscious and deliberate processes of learning and development, for exploration and accomplishing goals” (Larson & Rusk, 2011, p. 98). Intrinsic motivation serves as a powerful engine for learning and making personal positive changes and development, and it is often part of what drives our attention towards an activity or task (Larson & Rusk, 2011; Rheinberg & Engeser, 2018). Knowing how teenage mothers and children born to teen parents are statistically at higher risk of experiencing poverty and numerous health and social disadvantages, having a strong intrinsic motivation to turn things around in their lives is important. Intrinsic motivation plays a significant role in the educational success of teenage mothers. According to Deci and Ryan (2017), intrinsic motivation is driven by fulfilling basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. When teenage mothers are intrinsically motivated, they are more likely to engage in learning activities that are meaningful to them, leading to higher academic achievement (Diaconu-Gherasim et al., 2020). The psychological well-being of teenage mothers is closely linked to their levels of intrinsic motivation. Intrinsically motivated individuals tend to experience higher levels of psychological well-being because they engage in personally fulfilling activities that align with their values (Ryan & Deci 2017). For teenage mothers, engaging in activities that they find inherently rewarding can help mitigate the stress and challenges associated with early motherhood (Cox et al., 2019). Masud and colleagues (2019) also found that higher socioeconomic status and parental support were associated with better academic performance and psychological well-being in adolescent students. Intrinsic motivation

contributes to overall life satisfaction among teenage mothers encouraging them to pursue personally meaningful goals, leading to greater fulfillment and satisfaction (Mesa, 2021). A study by Pomerantz and colleagues (2017) found that parental involvement supporting autonomy and competence can enhance intrinsic motivation and life satisfaction. This is particularly important for teenage mothers, who often face numerous external pressures and challenges. Teenage mothers can improve their overall quality of life by focusing on activities that they find intrinsically rewarding.

One of the key factors in developing intrinsic motivation is the sense of autonomy. Although research points to adverse general life outcomes for teenage mothers, teenage mothers who feel they have control over their decisions and actions are more likely to be intrinsically motivated (Çelik, 2024). Autonomy is a fundamental psychological need that enhances intrinsic motivation when fulfilled (Ryan & Deci, 2017). For teenage mothers, this means having the freedom to make choices about their education, parenting, and personal lives. Feeling competent and capable is another critical component of intrinsic motivation. Individuals who believe in their ability to succeed are more likely to be motivated and persist in the face of challenges (Bandura et al., 1999). For teenage mothers, this can be in the form of building self-efficacy through educational and parenting skills training which can significantly boost their intrinsic motivation. Research points out that adolescent mothers often have aspirations related to education, career, and personal development, and their experiences of being a mother shape these aspirations and the strategies they employ to achieve them (Klaw, 2008). Such aspirations could be effective factors to motivation if there are good support systems to help shape them.

The need for relatedness, or connection to others, is also essential for intrinsic motivation. Teenage mothers with strong social support networks are more likely to feel motivated to pursue

their goals (Masud et al., 2019). Teenage mothers tend to report a high connection with their children, which motivates these young women to succeed for the sake of their children by going to school, being better caregivers, securing employment, and reordering their lives accordingly (Mollborn, 2017). There is also the possibility of a heightened sense of responsibility and maturity that comes after having a child and the motivation to provide a better future for the child (Chohan & Langa, 2011). Motherhood does serve as a motivating factor for teenage mothers. Still, it may not be enough, especially for teenage mothers who come from low-income families, which, unfortunately, are families that statically report the highest rate of teenage pregnancy.

Teenage Mothers and Extrinsic Motivation

Contrary to intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation is a heterogeneous category that addresses outside factors unrelated to an individual's inherent satisfactions, such as reward and punishment, grades, or approval from others (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Extrinsic motivation is very effective when motivating people towards goals or activities that do not appeal to them (Borghans et al., 2013). Extrinsic de-motivation can be a strong form of motivation for teenage mothers, especially as they have multiple external factors such as cultural, socioeconomic, and systemic punishing factors that limit their ability to advance (Mesa, 2021).

Extrinsic motivation can provide the necessary drive to achieve important goals. Extrinsic motivation can lead to positive outcomes across various educational levels and cultural contexts (Morris et al., 2022). For teenage mothers, external rewards such as financial incentives, recognition, and support from family and community can help mitigate the stress and challenges associated with early motherhood (Plaza et al., 2024). Extrinsic motivation contributes to overall life satisfaction among teenage mothers by providing tangible rewards and recognition for their

efforts (Mesa, 2021). A study by Mata and colleagues (2018) found that parental support and involvement, which often include extrinsic motivators, are associated with higher levels of student motivation and academic achievement. For teenage mothers, achieving educational and personal goals through extrinsic motivation can lead to greater accomplishment and life satisfaction (Celik, 2024). The experiences of teenage mothers have shown a strong positive relationship between social support and growth stories such as education, vocation, and successful parental outcomes (Pellegrino, 2015). Fostering more external support, which serves as extrinsic motivation, can promote teenage mothers' sense of motivation as they navigate their journey of parenting and self-reliance.

Cultural Effects on Teenage Mother Experiences

The experiences of teenage mothers are profoundly shaped by cultural contexts, which influence their roles, expectations, and support systems (Severinsen et al., 2024). In Hispanic culture, traditional values such as familismo (the importance of family) and educación (education and moral upbringing) play a significant role in shaping the experiences of teenage mothers. Latina mothers often emphasize the centrality of their maternal role, viewing motherhood as a pivotal aspect of their identity and responsibility (Cahill et al., 2021). According to a study on Latina mothers' cultural beliefs, these women often prioritize their children's well-being and education, reflecting deep-rooted cultural values (Durand, 2010). This cultural emphasis on family support can play an important factor in Latina teenage mothers as they navigate the challenges of early motherhood. Additionally, the concept of familism, which underscores the importance of family loyalty and cohesion, is prevalent among Hispanic/Latino individuals (Cahill et al., 2021). Duran (2021) systematic review and meta-analysis on familism values highlights how these cultural norms influence family dynamics and individual adjustment. For

teenage mothers, this often translates into receiving substantial familial support, which can mitigate some of the stresses associated with early motherhood and facilitate their pursuit of career goals (Duran, 2021).

African American teenage mothers tend to navigate their experiences within a context marked by historical and cultural resilience (Murry et al., 2023). Culturally relevant parenting approaches among African American families emphasize trauma-informed and strengths-based practices, which are crucial for supporting teenage mothers (Smith et al., 2023). These approaches recognize the unique challenges faced by African American families, including systemic racism and socio-economic disparities, and aim to empower mothers through culturally sensitive support. In a study analyzing interactions between African American teenage mothers and their mothers, Davies & Rhodes (1994) revealed both supportive and problematic aspects of these relationships. While familial support is often present, the dynamics can be complex, with intergenerational tensions sometimes arising (Davies & Rhodes, 1994). However, the strong sense of community and extended family networks typical in African American culture can provide critical emotional and practical support, aiding teenage mothers in balancing their responsibilities and career aspirations (Smith et al., 2023).

In White American culture, the experiences of teenage mothers can be influenced by different socio-cultural factors. A meta-analytic review on racial/ethnic discrimination and well-being during adolescence highlights that White American teenagers may face unique challenges related to perceived discrimination (Benner & Wang, 2016). While this discrimination is less about race and more about socio-economic status or other factors, it can still impact their well-being and experiences as teenage mothers. The cultural identity of Caucasian Americans, as explored in a study on contemporary identity and challenges, reveals common characteristics

such as individualism and self-reliance (Myers et al., 2005). These cultural traits can shape the experiences of teenage mothers by fostering a sense of independence and self-determination. However, the lack of a strong communal support system, compared to Hispanic and African American cultures, may pose additional challenges for White American teenage mothers in balancing motherhood and career pursuits (Smiley et al., 2023).

The cultural context significantly influences the experiences of teenage mothers across different communities. Hispanic culture's emphasis on family support, African American culture's resilience and community networks, and White American culture's individualism each present unique challenges and opportunities for teenage mothers. Understanding these cultural differences is crucial for developing effective support systems that can help teenage mothers transition into successful career women.

Positionality Statement

A phenomenological approach to data analysis in qualitative studies requires in-depth exploration of how a participant makes sense of their lived experiences, as well as the researcher's ability to make sense of the participant's lived experiences and identify patterns across other cases (participants) for general statements while maintaining the value or richness of each participant's individual experiences. This calls for a sense of awareness of researchers' personal biases and the importance of possibly collaborating with members of the focused population during data analysis to promote validity.

Cognizant of this important component for enhancing the credibility and validity of our data analysis, our study highlights the author's individual experiences and social location and their potential influence on the study. The author is not a parent, a single Black male from Cameroon, the central region of Africa, and was born to and raised by a teenage single mother.

His maleness and lack of parenting experience present him with the challenge of fully comprehending the complex experiences around parenting and can bring in the possibility of under-reading or over-reading into participants' lived experiences. The author is also aware of the cultural differences between the participants and important factors of the study, such as gender expectations/roles, mothering, marriage, social views around teenage pregnancy, and the challenges women face in the workforce. Lastly, the author is aware of his childhood experiences as the child of a teenage single mother and how those experiences are possibly playing a role in his interpretation of participants' lived experiences. The two other coders in this study are White, cisgendered married females with children born within marriage. The coders are self-aware of the differences in their experiences as mothers within marriage and those of the participants in this study who began as teenage mothers. The coders are also aware of the vast difference in experiences when developing a career path as a woman within a marriage versus a woman with a child born during her teenage years, and the possible biases these differences can bring in their interpretation of the data. The author is a PhD research student in Couple and Family Therapy with a research focus on teenage parents and single mothers. The two coders are PhD research students in Prevention Science.

Chapter 3 - Method

Research Design

Interpretive Phenomenological Approach (IPA) was chosen for this study to deeply explore and understand the lived experiences of career women who were once teenage mothers. IPA is well suited for the study because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the personal experiences and meanings participants attach to their journeys from adolescent mothers to career women. IPA focuses on understanding how individuals make sense of their life experiences (Smith, 2008), which aligns perfectly with the aim of capturing the nuanced and subjective stories of the participants. This approach also facilitates the identification of common themes and patterns across the participants' narratives, enhancing the overall understanding of their shared experiences (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). This approach was particularly effective as it focused on capturing the essence of participants' unique journeys, challenges, and triumphs. By emphasizing the subjective experiences and personal perceptions of these individuals, phenomenology allowed for a rich, detailed exploration of how they navigated their transitions from teenage motherhood to successful career women. This method ensured that the nuanced and often complex realities of their lives were authentically represented, providing valuable insights into the meanings they ascribed to their experiences. Ultimately, this approach offered significant contributions to the broader understanding of the intersection between early motherhood and career development.

Participants

The study focused on women who met the following criteria: must be at least twenty-five years old, became a mother before reaching eighteen, were not married at the time of their first birth, were the caregiver for their child/children born during adolescence, has a stable career with

a steady income, demonstrates financial stability defined as the ability to provide for her family's basic needs (such as housing, food, healthcare, and education) without experiencing significant financial stress, and must be a U.S. citizen.

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling to ensure they met the study's specific criteria. Recruitment was conducted through professional networks and community organizations that support women and mothers. Following the above criteria, five participants were selected, all from Central Texas. The characteristic of each participant is as follows:

Participant KM. KM is a 46-year-old White woman who exemplifies resilience and determination. Married to the father of her teenage pregnancy, KM has successfully raised six children. She became a mother at the age of 15, a challenging period that demanded immense inner strength and adaptability. Despite these early challenges, a significant part of her story was her perseverance in school. Taking ten years to complete her bachelor's degree, KM pursued higher education, earning a master's degree. She now works in the education sector, earning over \$60,000 annually and owning her own home. KM's journey highlights the power of perseverance and the importance of a supportive partnership in achieving long-term success.

Participant CK. CK, a 28-year-old Hispanic woman, also showcases remarkable determination. Married to the father of her teenage pregnancy, CK is currently expecting her fourth child. She became a mother at the age of 14, a time when balancing education and motherhood was particularly demanding. CK holds a bachelor's degree and works with a research institution, earning over \$40,000 annually. A big theme in CK's story was her determination to defy conventional beliefs about teenage mothers. Her story underscores the significance of self-advocacy and autonomy in overcoming early motherhood challenges and achieving professional success.

Participant FT. FT is a 38-year-old Hispanic woman who has navigated the complexities of teenage motherhood with resilience. She has two children and is married, though not to the father of her teenage pregnancy. FT became a mother as a 15-year-old teenager and has since earned a bachelor's degree. She works as a social worker, making over \$50,000 annually. Her narrative is built around finding communities and support systems to plug in. Receiving almost zero support from parents and child's father during teenage motherhood, FT's success came from plugging herself into communities and support systems that paved her way to success. FT's journey illustrates the importance of adaptability and the ability to rebuild and thrive despite early life challenges.

Participant MG. MG, a 35-year-old Hispanic woman, is a testament to the power of seeking resources and staying driven amidst adversities. Unmarried and raising one child, MG became a mother at the age of 15. She has pursued a career in the health department, earning a bachelor's degree in nursing and making over \$60,000 annually. Her journey is signified by strict discipline, self-focus, and commitment. MG's story highlights the challenges of balancing education, work, and motherhood, and the determination required to succeed in all these areas.

Participant AA. AA is a 41-year-old White woman who has demonstrated significant resilience and adaptability. Divorced and raising three children, AA became a mother at the age of 16. She has earned a bachelor's degree and works in the health industry, making over \$55,000 annually. AA's narrative shows how the challenges of young motherhood, including potential isolation and the need for a strong support system, became driving forces for her success. Her story emphasizes the importance of inner strength and self-belief in overcoming adversity and achieving professional and personal growth.

Name	Current age	Age when pregnant	Current marital status	Education	Race/Ethnicity	Number of kids	Income	Career
MG	35	15	Unmarried	BS	Latina	1	\$60,000	Health Sector
AA	41	16	Divorced	BS	White	3	\$55,000	Health Sector
FT	38	15	Married	BS	Latina	2	\$50,000	Child Welfare
CK	28	14	Married	BS	Latina	4	\$40,000	Research Lab
KM	46	15	Married	Masters	White	6	\$60,000	Education Sector

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board (IRB) before commencing the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood the purpose of the study, their rights, and the confidentiality of their data. Participants were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

Data Collection

Data was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. This method allowed participants to share their stories in their own words, providing a comprehensive understanding of their experiences. All interviews were conducted via Zoom. Interviews lasted between 45 to 65 minutes, an average of 55 minutes per interview. The interview guide included open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed narratives about the participants' journeys from adolescence to their current careers. Key areas of focus included initial challenges faced as adolescent mothers, sources of motivation and support, strategies used to overcome socio-cultural, economic, systemic, and educational barriers, key turning points and milestones in their career development, and reflections on their current career status and future aspirations.

Data Analysis

All interviews and transcriptions were completed before data analysis began. The author conducted all interviews, with a maximum of two interviews per day to avoid fatigue. Transcriptions were reviewed by all coders for accuracy. The coding team consisted of three coders: the author, a PhD research student specializing in both qualitative and quantitative studies in couple and family therapy, and two additional PhD research students focusing on qualitative and quantitative studies in prevention science. The data analysis was done using the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to uncover themes and patterns, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences, (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). The process began with transcribing all interviews verbatim using iTranscribe to maintain accuracy and capture the nuances of participants' expressions. The coders then immersed themselves in the data by repeatedly reading the transcripts, allowing for a deep and thorough familiarization with the content.

Initial coding involved generating codes that identify significant statements and phrases related to the research questions. This step is crucial as it lays the foundation for theme development by highlighting key insights and recurring subjects. Coders were initially given a week to immerse themselves in the participants' narratives, ensuring a deep understanding of each participant's experiences. Following this immersion period, coders conducted initial coding individually. Subsequently, they convened for an intercoder agreement meeting, where they discussed their coding results, aligned their codes, and refined them for accuracy and coherence. In a subsequent meeting, coders collaboratively grouped these initial codes into broader themes. This process involved iterative writing and rewriting to ensure a clear and accurate representation of the participants' experiences. The themes underwent a meticulous review and refinement process to ensure they accurately represented the data. This involved cross-checking

the themes against the original transcripts and making necessary adjustments to enhance their validity and representation by the coders. Each theme was clearly defined and named to reflect its essence, ensuring the themes were both descriptive and interpretive.

Finally, the analysis culminated in writing a detailed narrative that integrated the themes. This narrative does not only describe the themes but also provides a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences. By putting together the themes and supporting them with direct quotes from the transcripts, the narrative has offered a rich, in-depth portrayal of the phenomena under study, contributing valuable insights to the field.

Validity and Reflexivity

A researcher memo was used as a form of reflexivity, capturing reflections, observations, challenges, and recommendations throughout the study. This helped the research team prepare better for subsequent interviews and the coding process. To ensure validity coders and interview were involved in dialogic engagement. Interviewer and coders engaged in member checking during interviews, coding, and writing. Although the interviews were conducted by one person, the other two coders provided ongoing support and recommendations. Participants in the study were also involved in the writing process by going through the material and pointing out phrases or narratives that did not accurately represent what they intended to share. The study employed the supervisory services of two qualitative research specialists and the services of one quantitative specialist from an outside perspective.

Chapter 4 - Results

The findings of this research revealed the profound and multifaceted experiences of career women who began their journeys as teenage mothers. Through in-depth qualitative analysis, three main themes and seven subthemes were developed, each encapsulating the resilience, resourcefulness, and growth of these women. The first theme, *Unyielding Resolve*, highlights the critical role of *adaptability* and *inner strength and self-belief*. These subthemes underscored how these women navigated the complexities of balancing education, work, and motherhood, demonstrating remarkable perseverance and self-efficacy in the face of significant challenges. The second theme, *Resourcefulness and Strategic Prioritization*, delves into the pragmatic approaches these women employed to manage their lives effectively. This theme includes subthemes such as (1) *making hard decisions on finances, time, and relationships*, (2) *leveraging education, government assistance, and social support*, and (3) *working multiple jobs*. The final theme, *Urgency as a Catalyst for Personal Growth and Change*, explores how the pressing demands of their circumstances spurred personal development. Subthemes like *self-advocacy and autonomy*, and *generational resilience/generational growth*, illustrate how these women harnessed urgency to drive transformative change in their lives and for future generations. Together, these themes provide a comprehensive understanding of the resilience and determination that characterize the journeys of these remarkable women.

Unyielding Resolve

One significant aspect of participants' stories was their approach to life with an unyielding resolve. The challenges of these women were enormous, often beginning the moment they discovered their pregnancies. Despite the overwhelming odds, they demonstrated

remarkable strengths and determination to overcome their circumstances. One of the participants, MG, captures her experience this way,

Sometimes a childcare plan can just totally be shattered while you are in the middle of school or work, and you have to figure things out. Being open to change and willing to learn from my experiences helped me navigate the challenges. I looked for jobs and educational programs that offered flexibility. I took online classes when possible and chose part-time work that could accommodate my school schedule. This flexibility was crucial in allowing me to balance my responsibilities.

Another participant FT shares that; *Time was hard to find. When I was pregnant my sister who is one year older than me was also pregnant, so it was literally everyone for herself for my parents could not support both of us. I did not initially plan that school was going to be my way forward for I thought I wouldn't have time for it. It was when my children's father left us that I realized that everything is now in my hands, and I must do something. I will close from work in the afternoon, spend the remaining daylight at school with kids, then in the night I am studying."*

This is how AA captures it; *The story of my pregnancy was on everyone's lips. It was hard to not feel like everyone was looking at me all the time. I know it was mostly in my head, but it was hard to shake it off. Some teachers were supportive, but others seemed to judge me silently. Balancing schoolwork with morning sickness and doctor appointments was exhausting. I often felt like I was drowning, trying to keep up with everything. The stigma was real. I think I can say the worst part of dealing with teenage pregnancy is the stigma. People looked at me differently. I felt so isolated at times. Finishing school was all that was in my head, but it was terrible going back there. I will never forget those looks. Thinking about it now, I wish my parents had the guts to pull me out and put me in some online school or something. They allowed me to complete my*

11th grade with a big stomach while all the students kept staring at me every time I walked into the class. The difficulties were endless. From dealing with the physical changes of pregnancy to the emotional rollercoaster, it was a tough journey. I had to grow up fast, learning to navigate a world that wasn't kind to teenage mothers. But despite all the hardships, I found strength I didn't know I had. My baby became my motivation to keep going, to fight for a better life.

FT and WK both highlighted the immense burden of lacking parental support. “Yeah, at the beginning of my children's lives, my parents were not supportive, they were not involved in my life. And looking back, I know now that it was because of the very controlling person I was with. I knew that I could not rely on my parents as well as on the father of my kids. If anything was to change in my life and that of my children, it all depended on me.” says FT.

The absence of a safety net meant they had to rely on their inner strength and resourcefulness to provide for themselves and their children. MG’s narrative vividly depicted the heavy weight of social shaming, judgment, and whispers of gossip and mockery surrounding her situation. Like some of the participants, she faced a complicated relationship with her child’s father and the profound loneliness that often accompanies such situations. AA shared countless moments of feeling overwhelmed, constantly battling depression, and exhaustion from sleepless nights. Like every other participant, the pressure from schoolwork and odd jobs, coupled with the constant worry about her child’s well-being, created a seemingly insurmountable mountain of stress.

There were countless moments when I felt overwhelmed, but I somehow managed to keep going. There were nights when I would cry myself to sleep, feeling the weight of the world on my shoulders. The exhaustion from sleepless nights, the pressure of school assignments, and the constant worry about my child's well-being often left me feeling defeated. Depression was a

constant battle, and there were times when I questioned whether I could keep going. One of the hardest moments was when I had to miss my child's first steps because I was at school. I felt like a terrible mother, and the guilt was crushing. The drive for me at the time was really my child. I reminded myself that I was doing this for both of us, to build a better future.

What seemed to make a difference in the life of these women amidst all these challenges was the essence of an unyielding resolve. It lies in the participants' ability to confront and overcome their obstacles with unwavering determination. Their stories illustrate a common thread of resilience, where each woman, despite her unique struggles, found the strength to persevere. This theme underscores the incredible fortitude required to navigate complexities of life as a teenage mother and ultimately succeed in their careers.

One of the ways these women showed unyielding resolve was through adaptability. Adaptability was a consistent message in their stories that significantly shaped their and their journey from teenage mothers to career women. It highlights the remarkable ability of these women to navigate and thrive amidst multifaceted challenges. For these mothers, adaptability was not just a skill but a lifeline. The transition from adolescence to motherhood demanded immediate and profound changes in their lives. They had to swiftly adapt to their new roles, balancing the demands of motherhood with their personal aspirations and responsibilities. KM reflected on this trait when she said,

So, where my educational career changed and took a big shift was when I became pregnant and when I had my daughter. I ended up becoming a dropout twice. Dropped out, then tried going back. The traditional school setting just did not work for me. I dropped out a second time and ended up in a, I mean, I don't even know what we call them now, but we had a name for it at that time. I ended up in a non-traditional school setting where I went to school, a self-paced

high school at night. I worked during the day. Well, and actually I flip-flopped. So, I started during the day and worked at night and then I flip-flopped partially through my program to working during the day and going to school at night and graduated three weeks before I had my second child.

Her story shows how the journey of pursuing education while raising a child is inherently complex. These women had to manage their time meticulously, often attending classes during the day and caring for their children during night or even vice versa as in the case of KM. The dual role of student and mother required them to be highly adaptable, consistently adjusting their schedules and priorities to meet the needs of both their academic and parental responsibilities. It was not just balancing education and mothering, there was also the extra layer of working to support their families financially. This is how FT captures it in her narrative.

When my kid started school, I was working at FedEx. It was a well-paid job back then, but then I wanted to be involved in my kids' lives. So, I quitFedEx and started volunteering in my kids' school reading books for children in Spanish. The school loved what I was doing and gave me job there where I was basically a teacher's aide, translating documents and translating for parents who speak only Spanish. Then I was encouraged to enroll in college if I want a permanent job there and that is how I started college in community college, one class at a time and more classes during summer. My kid's school functioned as both my workplace and my daycare while I attended a community college for my bachelor's degree.

Her narrative depicts how these women had to navigate the pressures of the workplace, the rigors of academic life, and the emotional and physical demands of parenting. This often meant sacrificing personal time and enduring long, exhausting days. There were also the social expectations and stigmas associated with being a teenage mother that added another layer of

complexity. They had to adapt to the social pressures and judgements, often finding strength in their resolve to prove themselves. CK recounted the harrowing experience of being labelled a statistic by her parents for not aborting the pregnancy by saying,

My mom will come home with, like, fat stacks of research and statistics on how, you know, you're never going to make it as a teen mom, you're going to be, you know, he's going to leave you, you're going to be a single mom, you're not going to graduate high school, like, you know, just the odds were stacked against me. And so just having all of that in the back of my mind was very, you know, there was a lot of uncertainty. But the thing is, I am the type that when someone tells me that I shouldn't do something, that is when I feel the urge to do it more. To me it was all about proving to my mother that I am not going to become a statistic. I was determined to prove them wrong."

This traumatic event created a massive chasm between her and her parents which took years to heal. They faced potential isolation and the pressing need for a robust support system. Yet, these very challenges became powerful catalysts for their success, driving them to overcome obstacles and achieve their goals with unwavering determination. Adaptability was a cornerstone of the unyielding resolve demonstrated by these women. Their ability to swiftly and effectively adapt to the demands of motherhood, education, and work was instrumental in their journey. This adaptability not only enabled them to manage their immediate challenges but also equipped them with the resilience and skills necessary for their ongoing personal and professional growth. Their stories are a testament to the power of adaptability in overcoming adversity and achieving success.

Another way they illustrated unyielding resolve in their journey is through inner strength and self-belief. The transition from adolescence to motherhood required a deep reservoir of

inner fortitude and an unwavering belief in their own capabilities. Participants often draw from their inner reservoirs of resilience and maintain a strong belief in their abilities and worth, even when faced with significant challenges. Their self-belief was crucial in maintaining the motivation and perseverance needed to succeed academically while fulfilling their parental responsibilities. The phrase ‘I was determined...’ echoed throughout their narratives, highlighting their steadfast resolve. AC summed up this sentiment when she said

Overcoming those moments of despair required resilience and determination. I kept reminding myself of my goals and the future I wanted for my child. Every step forward, no matter how small, was a step closer to that dream. It was a long and difficult journey, but the struggles made me stronger and more determined to succeed.

Her story is a testament to the power of unyielding resolve through self-belief, and the relentless pursuit of a better future, despite the overwhelming odds. For CK, the journey was about proving her parents wrong and defying the expectation that she would become a statistic. Her turning point came when she was at the abortion clinic, and the staff informed her that they could not proceed if she was being coerced. This moment was pivotal for CK, as she realized she could advocate for herself and change the narrative. She reflected,

My parents were feeding into like the you're going to be a statistic, like you're going to be a, you know, a dropout, a single mom, like all these negative storylines associated with it..., to them the best option was abortion. I was scared and didn't want to go through that. When the lady at the abortion clinic told me that if anyone is forcing me to abort the child, then they can't go ahead with the procedure. That was like the turning point for me. It really had my understanding that I could be an advocate for myself, and I could, you know, really change the narrative.

Her story paints a picture of self-belief that counters external negativity. The core of inner strength and self-belief lies in the participants' ability to confront and overcome their obstacles with unwavering determination.

The theme, *unyielding resolve*, shows the importance of intrinsic motivation and autonomy in the experiences of these women. The participants demonstrated a strong sense of autonomy as they navigated the challenges of early motherhood, education, and work. Their ability to adapt to changing circumstances and maintain a belief in their own capabilities allowed them to make independent decisions that aligned with their personal goals and values. This sense of control and self-direction was crucial in helping them overcome obstacles and persist in their pursuits. By exercising control over their educational and career choices, these women were able to create opportunities for themselves and build resilience against societal pressures. Their stories highlight how autonomy can empower individuals to achieve their goals despite significant challenges.

Resourcefulness and Strategic Prioritization

The theme of resourcefulness and strategic prioritization was identified as crucial in the lives of the participants. This theme encapsulates their ability to effectively manage limited resources and make deliberate choices to advance their careers while ensuring the well-being of their children. The participants demonstrated in their stories remarkable ingenuity and foresight in navigating the challenges they faced, which played a significant role in their personal and professional development. For these women, resourcefulness was not just about making do with they had; it was about actively seeking out opportunities and leveraging available resources to create a better future. Thirty-nine-year-old FT captures it this way,

The support that I thought I needed from family, well it did not come, so I felt like I became motivated by that to do my own things and get myself where I needed to be. I knew I had to take student loans, I had to work jobs, I had to be part of YMCA. I couldn't make friends, if I made any friends, they were the teachers at school, the workers at my jobs. All of them had a part to play in my life. I went close to some of them so my children could have access to other children so I could have a place for daycare when I am in school or at work. Everything around me was a resource.

The importance of this theme is evident in the ways it helped participants develop their careers. Prioritizing their education and professional goals, they were able to build the skills, and the qualifications needed to secure better job opportunities. Their ability to fend for and strategically manage resources also enabled them to overcome financial obstacles, which was a huge part of their journey. This is how AC describes her experience,

I was willing to seek support from any place that I could get one. Support came from various places, but it was often a mixed bag. My parents were inconsistent at best. One thing that is really helpful is joining one of these teen programs out there. I found help through teen parent programs. These programs were like the parents that I was missing all this while. They provided resources like parenting classes, counseling, and even financial assistance..., I applied for and received benefits like WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) and food stamps, which helped me provide for my baby. It wasn't easy navigating the bureaucracy, but the assistance made a significant difference.

Participants exemplified resourcefulness and strategic prioritization through making hard decisions around things like finances, time, and relationships. Financial stress was a significant obstacle, with money-related concerns driving many of their decisions. They constantly balanced

the need to pay rent, buy necessities for their child, and manage school expenses with limited resources. However, for these participants, financial stress was a motivator, not a deterrence.

Forty-six-year-old KM puts it this way,

You know how living on government assistance is, the finances are tight, and you know how people feel about those living on government assistance. I wanted to get out of it as soon as possible. Have an income that allows us to live a life like others are doing, be able to buy a house, be able to buy the car I want, not riding a junk of 235,000 mileage. I just wanted to have a career that pays well and is also fulfilling.

The determination to improve their financial situation drove participants to make strategic choices about their time and resources. Their financial struggles were often a signal to them that they are on a mission to make things better for themselves and their family. According to CK, she had to juggle between multiple responsibilities.

But as far as me balancing all those roles, it really took a lot of time management, a lot of organization, and figuring out where all these things fit. Because I did have multiple jobs in college. I worked as a nanny. I worked at a daycare. I worked at a clothing store for kids. And I had a lot of different roles and responsibilities. And so, I always just kept it in the back of my mind that there's children that are depending on me. There's an end goal in sight. There's going to be a day where I don't have to work all these different part-time jobs to make ends meet.

Moreover, participants had to navigate complex relationships, often making sacrifices in their personal lives to prioritize their career and family goals. This included setting boundaries with unsupportive individuals and seeking out positive influence and mentors who could provide guidance and encouragement. FT shares this sentiment as she explains,

It was when my kids' father left that I realized he was the one holding me back. At first, I thought cutting off from him was going to ruin me and I was scared of what the situation would be like for the kids. But as I met with my counselor, it blew my mind that I was already doing it on my own even when their father was with me. That was it, right there I knew that on my own I would be much better off.

Their ability to make these tough decisions and prioritize effectively was a testament to their resilience and strategic thinking. It underscores their commitment to breaking free from constraints and achieving long-term stability.

Participants also showed resourcefulness and strategic prioritization through leveraging government assistance programs such as SNAP, WIC, and parenting programs, along with mental health services and community organizations (including local churches and online forums). These resources provided a safety net that allowed them to prioritize their education and career goals. Education was a significant support system for these women. All participants completed college, which not only provided them with a sense of purpose and direction but also served as a haven. For many, the pursuit of education offered stability and a sense of progress amidst their challenging circumstances. AA shared this sentiment, saying, “*school was where I felt most safe because it made me feel like I am on to something that will make a difference in my life.*” and another said, “*For me, my resources was college, the communities I found around school, and the teachers and their families.*” Scavenging for resources was a critical aspect of these women’s lives. They were acutely aware of their resource limitations and the necessity of finding support, which drove them to make tremendous efforts to seek out places and connections that could provide better resources. MG describes her journey this way by saying the following,

It is all about putting my hands anywhere I thought I could find assistance. It's not easy, if not impossible, to do it on your own. The burden just keeps piling up and if you can't find assistance from people or resources you will surely give up. So, I was not sleeping at all till I know I have a daycare somewhere for my child, financial assistance somewhere for school, or a better job that can give me time for school and taking care of my child.

Moreover, the educational journey fostered a community of peers and mentors who provided additional support and encouragement. This network was instrumental in helping participants navigate their academic and career paths as FT of them noted, “For me, my education was the one that did it for me because I qualified for free tuition. I was able to get free school and then \$500 extra. The \$500 came for books and that to me was a lot.” The combination of government assistance, community support, and educational opportunities created a robust framework that empowered these women to overcome obstacles and achieve their goals.

Working multiple jobs was another way they exemplified resourcefulness and strategic prioritization in their journey. A theme that ran across all participants as they talked about the different jobs they had while going to school was the idea that they all saw it as a means to an end. Each part-time job was an echo that they needed something better, something bigger, and an emphasis that their children cannot have enough if they do not move further ahead. KM encapsulates this sentiment:

I did a lot of different things—bar attending, fast food, you name it. But they were all jobs and things that were not career paths. It was difficult to go to school and then work and not have to call in. So, I knew these jobs were not for me and I had to finish school. I was in college for 10

years, started at 21 and ended at 31. So many ups and downs, but I knew I had to finish it. Now I have my master's and a well-paid job.

The narrative highlights the participants' resilience and long-term vision. Despite the immediate pressures and the demanding nature of working multiple jobs, they remained focused on their goal: securing a stable and fulfilling career. Their ability to persevere through years of balancing work, education, and family responsibilities demonstrates their unwavering commitment to creating a better future for themselves and their children. The experience of working multiple jobs also provided lessons in time management, prioritization, and perseverance. MG puts it this way,

I had to grow up much faster than I ever expected. When you become a teenage mother at such a young age as I was, you adopt some new behaviors really quickly. I found that I became very disciplined with my time. I kept a detailed schedule to ensure I could fit in everything I needed to do. I often had to study late at night or early in the morning when my daughter was asleep. I went for part-time jobs that could accommodate my school schedule. The flexibility was crucial in allowing me to balance my responsibilities.

These disciplines were instrumental in their academic and professional success, further illustrating how their resourcefulness and strategic prioritization enabled them to overcome obstacles and achieve their goals. The theme resourcefulness and strategic prioritization shows the importance of extrinsic motivation and relatedness in the journey of these women. As they connected with resourceful organizations and people, they found motivation to keep building a future for themselves and their children. Their challenges as young mothers necessitated a strong support network, including family, friends, and community resources. These connections provided emotional support, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging, which were essential

for the participants' well-being and motivation. Additionally, the desire to create a better future for their children and to break generational cycles of adversity further strengthened the concept of extrinsic motivation among teen mothers. The theme also illustrates how competence played a strong role in their journey. By strategically managing their resources and making informed decisions, they were able to navigate the complexities of their lives successfully. Their ability to balance multiple roles and responsibilities, while continuously striving for personal and professional growth, reflects their high level of competence and self-efficacy.

Urgency as a Catalyst for Personal Growth and Change

The theme of "*Urgency as a Catalyst for Personal Growth and Change*" emerged as a significant factor in the participants' narratives. Participants consistently expressed a profound sense of urgency to improve their circumstances. This urgency acted as a powerful motivator, driving them to make significant changes in their lives and pursue personal and professional growth. For three participants, the urgency stemmed from a desire to provide a better life for their children and break free from the constraints of their past. While for the other two participants it stemmed from their need to prove those who doubted them wrong. Listen to FT describe her journey,

Yeah, honestly, I felt like I was in a situation where I knew I was going to struggle in that situation. And then I knew that if things must change, I needed to have some form of schooling. And so, I wanted to, I guess even then I needed to go to school. I looked at the possibility of making better money. I knew that if I got a GED, my options for getting jobs and getting more pay would be higher. I wanted to, I don't know, it was just like you see for yourself that it won't work and you're like, okay, I got to get something done."

CK captures her experience like this,

My parents kept feeding me with the idea that I am going to become a statistic if I keep my baby. They said things like 'you will be a dropout, a single mother,' all these negative story lines associated with teen pregnancy. Personally, I have this nature where when someone tells me not to do something that is what I tend to do, the opposite exactly. And so that was what really drove me to be successful. It was that I wanted to prove them wrong.

AA puts her experience this way,

After my baby was born, it was not a question of whether or not, I knew I had to finish high school no matter what. I had to grow up fast, learning to navigate a world that wasn't kind to teenage mothers... graduating high school was like a huge victory. I was proud of myself for making it through, but I knew the journey was far from over. Getting into nursing school was the next big hurdle. It was always one thing after another and needed to be ready for it.

This sense of urgency was not just about immediate survival but about long-term transformation. It pushed them to take bold steps, such as returning to school, seeking better job opportunities, and engaging in personal development activities. Moreover, the urgency to change their circumstances often resulted in a heightened sense of focus and determination. Participants described how this urgency helped them prioritize their goals and make strategic decisions about their time and resources. MG puts her experience this way,

I faced a lot of judgement and whispers. It felt like everyone was watching me, waiting for me to fail. But I think I was determined to prove them wrong. I was incredibly determined to go back to school. I wanted to set a good example for my child and show that no matter what obstacles come your way, you can overcome them with hard work and determination.

It also fostered a sense of resilience, as they navigated obstacles and setbacks with a clear vision of their desired future. Two key factors were identified that support this theme. Urgency

propelled participants toward self-advocacy and autonomy. The ability to advocate for themselves and exercise autonomy was crucial in their journey. Participants took control of their decisions and actively sought opportunities for advancement and reported greater personal growth and a stronger sense of empowerment. One participant, KM, vividly described this journey:

One thing I tell teen mothers today is that 'you shouldn't be shy to ask for help. You need to let people know what you are going through.' That is something I realized when I had my child. I was shy at first, feeling ashamed to approach people and ask for help, especially when I needed someone to take care of my child so I could go to work or school or even just run an errand. Then I realized how it was not helping me. I needed to let people know that I needed help. It was hard to do that, but it was necessary. Nobody was going to come to me and ask if I needed help. I had to talk with organizations to find out if I could get free daycare while I am in school or at work.

This narrative highlights the critical role of self-advocacy and autonomy in overcoming obstacles and achieving personal milestones. Participants' stories consistently reflected a proactive approach to life changes, underscoring the importance of taking initiative and making empowered choices. Their experiences illustrate how a strong sense of agency can lead to profound personal development and a sustained commitment to future goals.

Participants also showed urgency through building generational resilience and growth. They emphasized the importance of breaking generational cycles of adversity as a crucial part of their journey. By striving to create better opportunities for themselves and their children, participants aimed to disrupt patterns of hardship and foster a more positive future. Some participants engaged in therapeutic practices to address their past traumas. They spoke about the

drive to ensure a future for their children that is free from the constraints of their previous experiences. This commitment to change was not just about personal growth but also about creating a legacy of resilience and strength for the future generations. Twenty-eight-year-old CK, who married the father to her baby, explained,

My husband and I have done a lot identifying our traumatic experiences and eliminating them from our household. We really had to face them and try to break those generational cycles. I just wanted something different for my family and that really has always been a strength.

The narrative highlights their determination and proactive efforts of participants to confront and overcome their past. Their stories consistently reflected a deep-seated desire to transform their lives and the lives of their children. By addressing and healing from their traumas, they not only empowered themselves but also set a foundation for a healthier, more resilient future for their families. Participants' experiences illustrated how generational resilience and growth are intertwined with the pursuit of a better life. Their efforts to break free from cycles of adversity and to create new, positive patterns underscore the transformative power of resilience and the enduring impact it can have across generations.

Urgency as a catalyst for personal growth and change shows the importance of intrinsic motivation and the fulfillment of basic psychological needs – competence, autonomy, and relatedness – in the journey of these women. Urgency created a sense of immediate necessity that propelled them to take decisive actions towards their goals. When they experienced urgency, it enhanced their sense of competence, and they navigated the complexities of balancing motherhood and career aspirations, pushing them to develop new skills and resilience. Moreover, the urgency to improve their circumstances fostered a strong sense of autonomy, as these mothers made proactive choices to shape their future. This urgency also strengthened their

relatedness, as they sought support and built connections with others who could help them achieve their goals.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

The findings of this study align with existing literature on the resilience and resourcefulness of adolescent mothers who transition into successful career women. The theme of *Unyielding Resolve* resonates with previous research that highlights the critical role of adaptability and inner strength in overcoming the challenges associated with early motherhood. Studies have shown that adolescent mothers often exhibit remarkable perseverance and self-efficacy, which are essential for balancing education, work, and parenting responsibilities (Torres et al., 2024). This aligns with the experiences of the participants in this study, who demonstrated significant determination and resilience from the moment they discovered their pregnancies. Their self-belief enabled them to endure long, exhausting days and to keep pushing forward despite the challenges. They learned to navigate setbacks and challenges with a positive mindset, which was crucial for their long-term success. Drawing from their inner reservoir of strength, they silenced external pressures to give up and instead focused on their internal drive to make a difference.

Pellegrino (2014) explored how adolescent mothers navigate the challenges of motherhood while still developing themselves, and came up with three themes: the ability to critically assess the alignment of their environments and needs, the transition from dependency to responsibility post-partum, and the active engagement in action plans to better align their environments to their needs (Pellegrino, 2014). These themes align with the "unyielding resolve" demonstrated by the participants in this study, who actively sought support systems to build their careers. By critically assessing resources, balancing motherhood with career aspirations, and executing strategic plans, participants exemplified unyielding resolve. They engaged with organizations supporting teen mothers and their dreams, enabling them to advance professionally while caring for their

families. Moreover, they refused to back down in the face of challenges, showing remarkable determination and resilience. Whether overcoming societal stigma, financial hardships, or personal setbacks, they remained steadfast in their pursuit of a better future for themselves and their families.

The theme of *Resourcefulness and Strategic Prioritization* further supports the notion that adolescent mothers possess a unique ability to manage limited resources effectively. Research has emphasized the importance of career adaptability and resiliency in the career development of adolescent mothers (Barto et al., 2015). The participants in this study showcased their ingenuity and foresight in navigating financial obstacles and making deliberate choices to advance their careers while ensuring their children's well-being. This finding is consistent with studies that highlight the role of strategic resource management in overcoming financial stress and achieving professional growth (Barto et al., 2015). Juggling between jobs was a testament to their resourcefulness and determination to provide for their families despite the challenges they faced. Also, Cox et al., (2019) emphasizes the importance of support systems and interventions in fostering the success of teen mothers. The randomized controlled trial found that a brief parenting and life skills intervention, paired with medical care, had positive effects on maternal self-esteem and significantly reduced repeat pregnancies over a 36-month period (Cox et al., 2019), which aligns with the theme of *Resourcefulness and Strategic Prioritization* in this study. These women understood the importance of support systems and intentionally engaged in seeking these supports to help build their careers. They were actively involved with organizations that support teen mothers and those that aligned with their career aspirations. By doing so, they were able to build their careers and take care of their families, demonstrating a proactive approach to leveraging available resources for personal and professional growth.

Mukuna & Aloka, (2021) also provides further insights into the resilience of teenage mothers. The study explores how teenage mothers in South Africa demonstrate resilience by adopting self-motivation and receiving support from schools and families (Mukuna & Aloka, 2021). Like this study, Mukuna & Aloka (2021) emphasizes the importance of support systems in fostering resilience.

The theme of *Urgency as a Catalyst for Personal Growth and Change* introduces a unique aspect of this study. While urgency as a motivator has been discussed in the context of adolescent motherhood, this study provides a deeper understanding of how urgency drives long-term transformation and personal development. Participants expressed a profound sense of urgency to improve their circumstances, which pushed them to take bold steps such as returning to school and seeking better job opportunities. This urgency resulted in a heightened sense of focus and determination, aligning with Self-Determination Theory's emphasis on intrinsic motivation and the fulfillment of psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The commitment to breaking generational cycles of adversity and fostering a positive future for their children adds a unique dimension to the existing literature, highlighting the transformative power of urgency in the lives of adolescent mothers.

Weigold et al. (2024), discusses how personal growth initiative (PGI) involves active and intentional participation in personal development. The study found that individuals who exhibit high levels of PGI are more likely to engage in behaviors that enhance their competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Weigold et al., 2024). This aligns with the findings of this study, as the urgency experienced by the participants propelled them to take decisive actions towards their goals, enhancing their sense of competence and resilience. By actively seeking out and utilizing resources, they demonstrated a proactive approach to personal growth, like the behaviors

described in the PGI framework. In another study, Nguyen et al. (2023), explore how a heightened sense of urgency can drive individual performance and improvement within organizations. The study found that urgency acts as a catalyst for individuals to make proactive choices and take immediate actions to improve their circumstances. This urgency fosters a strong sense of autonomy and relatedness, as individuals seek support and build connections to achieve their goals (Nguyen et al., 2023). This mirrors the experiences of the women in this study, who, driven by a sense of urgency, made proactive choices to shape their futures and sought support from organizations that aligned with their career aspirations. The urgency to improve their circumstances not only enhanced their autonomy but also strengthened their relatedness by building supportive networks.

Overall, the findings of this study contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted experiences of adolescent mothers who become career women. By exploring themes of resilience, resourcefulness, and urgency, this research underscores the importance of support systems and strategic resource management in facilitating personal and professional growth. The unique insights provided by this study offer valuable implications for developing targeted interventions and support programs to empower adolescent mothers in their journey towards successful careers.

Limitations

This study has some limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. Firstly, all participants were from Central Texas, which may introduce regional biases and limit the applicability of the results to other geographic areas. The demographic composition of the participants, consisting of two White and three Hispanic women, may also influence the findings. The experiences and challenges faced by adolescent mothers from different racial and ethnic

backgrounds may vary, and the study's findings may not fully capture these diverse experiences. Furthermore, the coding and analysis were conducted by a team of three researchers: one Black single male and two married White women with children. Although efforts were made to ensure objectivity and reliability in the coding process, the personal backgrounds and perspectives of the coders may have influenced the interpretation of the data. Lastly, the study's reliance on self-reported data from the participants introduces the potential for recall bias and social desirability bias. Participants may have selectively recalled or presented their experiences in a manner that they perceived as favorable or socially acceptable.

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the experiences of adolescent mothers who have become career women, highlighting key themes and strategies that contributed to their success.

Implications

The findings of this study have several important implications. Firstly, they highlight the critical role of resilience and strategic resourcefulness in the success of adolescent mothers. The themes identified in this study underscore the importance of providing targeted support that fosters adaptability, self-belief, and strategic decision-making. Additionally, the study emphasizes the need for comprehensive support systems, including educational opportunities, government assistance, and social support networks, to help adolescent mothers navigate their multiple responsibilities. The role of urgency in catalyzing personal growth suggests that interventions should also focus on empowering adolescent mothers to advocate for themselves and take autonomous actions towards their goals.

Furthermore, the role of therapists and clinicians is crucial in this context. Clinical work should focus on fostering autonomy, competence, and relatedness, as these qualities drive career

success. Therapists can help young mothers develop both short-term and long-term goals, providing them with the tools and support needed to stay driven by the desire to improve their lives for the sake of their children. By addressing the psychological and emotional needs of adolescent mothers, clinicians can play a pivotal role in their journey towards achieving career success and personal fulfillment.

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made such as enhancing support programs. In developing and implementing support programs that specifically address the unique challenges faced by adolescent mothers, these programs should focus on building resilience, providing educational opportunities, and enhancing social support. Participants in this study showed that their breakthrough to success was significantly intertwined with reliable support programs. Policies that provide comprehensive support to adolescent mothers, including access to affordable childcare, educational grants, and job training programs, are vital for their success. The women in this study demonstrated that developmental programs play a more significant role in their journey than handout programs. In fact, those who relied on handout programs like food stamps yearned for economic independence. Policies should shift focus from handout programs to career development initiatives. These initiatives should emphasize acquiring trade skills, furthering education, crafting business proposals, and promoting self-development. By prioritizing programs that aim to develop adolescent mothers into career women, we can foster their long-term success and economic independence. Such policies will not only provide immediate relief but also empower these women to build sustainable and fulfilling careers, ultimately benefiting their families and communities.

Furthermore, this study shows the need to encourage community organizations to create mentorship and support networks for adolescent mothers. These networks can provide guidance,

emotional support, and practical assistance, helping young mothers to navigate their challenges and achieve their career goals. Every participant in this study pointed to some form of mentorship or network they linked to that served as a lifeline.

Lastly, additional research with larger and more diverse samples to validate and expand upon the findings of this study is important. Future research should also explore the long-term outcomes of adolescent mothers who receive targeted support and interventions as well as those who participate in developmental programs versus handout programs. By addressing these recommendations, stakeholders can better support adolescent mothers in their journey towards successful careers and personal fulfillment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted experiences of adolescent mothers who transition into successful career women. The theme of Unyielding Resolve highlights the critical role of adaptability, inner strength, and self-belief. Participants demonstrated remarkable perseverance and self-efficacy, navigating the complexities of balancing education, work, and motherhood. Their intrinsic motivation and autonomy were crucial in overcoming obstacles and making independent decisions aligned with their personal goals and values. This sense of control and self-direction empowered them to persist in their pursuits and create opportunities for themselves, building resilience against societal pressures.

The theme of Resourcefulness and Strategic Prioritization underscores the pragmatic approaches these women employed to manage their lives effectively. Participants showcased their ingenuity and foresight in navigating challenges, actively seeking out opportunities and leveraging available resources to create a better future. Their ability to manage limited resources

and make deliberate choices was instrumental in their academic and professional success. The importance of extrinsic motivation and relatedness is evident as participants connected with resourceful organizations and people, finding motivation to build a future for themselves and their children. Strong support networks provided emotional support, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging, essential for their well-being and motivation. Competence played a significant role in their journey, as they balanced multiple roles and responsibilities while striving for personal and professional growth.

The theme of Urgency as a Catalyst for Personal Growth and Change reveals how a profound sense of urgency drove participants to make significant changes in their lives. This urgency acted as a powerful motivator, enhancing their sense of competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Participants expressed a deep-seated desire to improve their circumstances, provide a better life for their children, and break free from past constraints. Their determination and proactive efforts to confront and overcome their past empowered them and set a foundation for a healthier, more resilient future for their families. The transformative power of urgency and resilience is evident in their pursuit of a better life, highlighting the enduring impact it can have across generations.

Overall, this study underscores the importance of support systems, strategic resource management, and intrinsic motivation in facilitating personal and professional growth for adolescent mothers. The unique insights provided offer valuable implications for developing targeted interventions and support programs to empower adolescent mothers in their journey towards successful careers.

References

- Abele, A. E., & Spurk, D. (2011). The dual impact of gender and the influence of timing of parenthood on men's and women's career development: Longitudinal findings. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 35(3), 225–232.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025411398181>
- Ahorlu, C. K., Pfeiffer, C., & Obrist, B. (2015). Socio-cultural and economic factors influencing adolescents' resilience against the threat of teenage pregnancy: a cross-sectional survey in Accra, Ghana. *Reproductive Health*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12978-015-0113-9>
- Akella, D., & Jordan, M. (2015). Impact of Social and Cultural Factors on Teen Pregnancy. *Journal of Health Disparities Research & Practice*, 8(1).
- Apas, L. C. (2023). Exploring challenges encountered by teenage mothers and coping mechanisms towards policy recommendations. *Zenodo (CERN European Organization for Nuclear Research)*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7973843>
- Bandura, A., Freeman, W. H., & Lightsey, R. (1999). Self-Efficacy: the exercise of control. *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 13(2), 158–166. <https://doi.org/10.1891/0889-8391.13.2.158>.
- Barto, H., Lambert, S., & Brott, P. (2015). Career adaptability, resiliency and perceived obstacles to career development of adolescent mothers. *The Professional Counselor*, 5(1), 53–66.
<https://doi.org/10.15241/hb.5.1.53>
- Benner, A. D., & Wang, Y. (2016). Racial/Ethnic Discrimination and Adolescents' Well-Being: The role of Cross-Ethnic Friendships and Friends' Experiences of Discrimination. *Child Development*, 88(2), 493–504.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12606>

- Borghans, L., Meijers, H., & Ter Weel, B. (2013). The importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for measuring IQ. *Economics of Education Review*, 34, 17–28.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2013.01.008>
- Bouffard, L. (2017). Ryan, R. M. et Deci, E. L. (2017). Self-determination theory. Basic psychological needs in motivation, development and wellness. New York, NY : Guilford Press. *Revue Québécoise De Psychologie*, 38(3), 231. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1041847ar>
- Briggs, G., Brownwell, M., & Roos, N. (2007c). Teen Mothers and Socioeconomic Status: The Chicken-Egg Debate. *Deleted Journal*, 9(1).
<https://jarm.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/jarm/article/download/5136/4332>
- Cabrera, E. F. (2007). Opting out and opting in: understanding the complexities of women’s career transitions. *Career Development International*, 12(3), 218–237.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430710745872>
- Cahill, K. M., Updegraff, K. A., Causadias, J. M., & Korous, K. M. (2021). Familism values and adjustment among Hispanic/Latino individuals: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 147(9), 947–985. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000336>
- Canter, H., Reed, J., Palmer, C., Casper, T. C., Stukus, K., Schmidt, S., Pickett, M., Mollen, C., Elsholz, C., Cruz, A. T., Augustine, E., & Goyal, M. K. (2024). Contraception use and pregnancy risk among adolescents in pediatric emergency departments. *JAMA Network Open*, 7(6), e2418213. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2024.18213>
- Çelik, O. (2024). Academic motivation in adolescents: the role of parental autonomy support, psychological needs satisfaction and self-control. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/FTsyg.2024.1384695>

- Chohan, Z., & Langa, M. (2011). Teenage mothers talk about their experience of teenage motherhood. *Agenda*, 25(3), 87–95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2011.610993>
- Cohen, S., & Wills, T. A. (1985). Stress, social support, and the buffering hypothesis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 98(2), 310–357. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.98.2.310>
- Cox, J. E., Harris, S. K., Conroy, K., Engelhart, T., Vyavaharkar, A., Federico, A., & Woods, E. R. (2019). A Parenting and Life skills Intervention for teen Mothers: a randomized controlled trial. *PEDIATRICS*, 143(3). <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-2303>
- Davis, A. A., & Rhodes, J. E. (1994). African-American teenage mothers and their mothers: An analysis of supportive and problematic interactions. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 22(1), 12–20. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629\(199401\)22:1](https://doi.org/10.1002/1520-6629(199401)22:1)
- Diaconu-Gherasim, L. R., Brumariu, L. E., & Hurley, J. G. (2020). Adolescents’ perceptions of contextual factors: Links with intrinsic motivation and academic achievement. *Current Psychology*, 41(8), 5578–5593. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-020-01076-6>
- Driscoll, A. (2014). Adult outcomes of teen mothers across birth cohorts. *Demographic Research*, 30, 1277–1292. <https://doi.org/10.4054/demres.2014.30.44>
- Durand, T. M. (2010). Latina mothers’ cultural beliefs about their children, parental roles, and education: Implications for effective and empowering Home-School partnerships. *The Urban Review*, 43(2), 255–278. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-010-0167-5>
- Gagné, M., & Deci, E. L. (2005). Self-determination theory and work motivation. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 26(4), 331–362. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.322>
- Govender, D., Naidoo, S., & Taylor, M. (2020). “I have to provide for another life emotionally, physically and financially”: understanding pregnancy, motherhood and the future

- aspirations of adolescent mothers in KwaZulu-Natal South, Africa. *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, 20(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-020-03319-7>
- Harding, J. F., Zief, S., Farb, A., & Margolis, A. (2020). Supporting Expectant and Parenting Teens: New evidence to inform future programming and research. *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, 24(S2), 67–75. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-020-02996-2>
- Hodgkinson, S., Beers, L., Southammakosane, C., & Lewin, A. (2013). Addressing the mental health needs of pregnant and parenting adolescents. *PEDIATRICS*, 133(1), 114–122. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2013-0927>
- Jang, H., Reeve, J., & Deci, E. L. (2010). Engaging students in learning activities: It is not autonomy support or structure but autonomy support and structure. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102(3), 588–600. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019682>
- Jakubowski, A., Roos, L. L., & Wall-Wieler, E. (2023). Unwinding the tangle of adolescent pregnancy and socio-economic functioning: leveraging administrative data from Manitoba, Canada. *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, 23(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-023-05443-6>
- Klaw, E. (2008). Understanding urban adolescent mothers' visions of the future in terms of possible selves. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 18(4), 441–462. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10911350802486767>
- Kumar, M., & Huang, K. Y. (2021). Impact of being an adolescent mother on subsequent maternal health, parenting, and child development in Kenyan low-income and high adversity informal settlement context. *PLoS ONE*, 16(4), e0248836. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0248836>

- Ladge, J. J., & Greenberg, D. N. (2015). Becoming a Working Mother: Managing identity and efficacy uncertainties during resocialization. *Human Resource Management*, 54(6), 977–998. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21651>.
- Landry, A. T., & Whillans, A. (2018). The Power of Workplace Rewards: Using Self-Determination Theory to understand why reward satisfaction matters for workers around the world. *Compensation & Benefits Review*, 50(3), 123–148. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886368719840515>.
- Machado, C., & Schwab, W. (2022). Empowering policies and practices for teen mothers. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.1819>
- Maslowsky, J., Hendrick, C. E., & Stritzel, H. (2021). Mechanisms linking teenage mothers' educational attainment with self-reported health at age 50. *BMC Women S Health*, 21(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-020-01150-y>
- Masud, S., Mufarrih, S. H., Qureshi, N. Q., Khan, F., Khan, S., & Khan, M. N. (2019). Academic Performance in adolescent Students: The role of Parenting Styles and Socio-Demographic Factors – A cross sectional study from Peshawar, Pakistan. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02497>
- Mesa, R. D. (2021). On teenage mothers' motivation and determination: Basis for guidance program. *International Journal of Research Studies in Education*, 10(13). <https://doi.org/10.5861/ijrse.2021.a046>
- McKay, A. (n.d.). Trends in teen pregnancy rates from 1996-2006: A comparison of Canada, Sweden, U.S.A., and England/Wales - ProQuest. <https://search.proquest.com/openview/5565ecb4b5b074edd16541ce476890b4/1?pq->

- [origsite=gscholar&cbl=33400https://search.proquest.com/openview/5565ecb4b5b074edd16541ce476890b4/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=33400](https://search.proquest.com/openview/5565ecb4b5b074edd16541ce476890b4/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=33400)
- McIntosh, B., McQuaid, R., Munro, A., & Dabir-Alai, P. (2012). Motherhood and its impact on career progression. *Gender in Management an International Journal*, 27(5), 346–364.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/17542411211252651>
- Mata, L., Pedro, I., & Peixoto, F. J. (2018). Parental support, student motivational orientation and achievement: The impact of emotions. *International Journal of Emotional Education*, 10(2), 77–92. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1197565.pdf>
- Metz, I. (2005). Advancing the careers of women with children. *Career Development International*, 10(3), 228–245. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13620430510598346>
- Miller, A. R. (2009). The effects of motherhood timing on career path. *Journal of Population Economics*, 24(3), 1071–1100. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00148-009-0296-x>
- Modesto, O. P. (2020). Understanding Factors Linked to adolescent Pregnancy: A Review of the Literature. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1263824>
- Mollborn, S. (2016). Teenage Mothers Today: What we know and how it matters. *Child Development Perspectives*, 11(1), 63–69. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12205>
- Murry, V. M., Nyanamba, J. M., Hanebutt, R., Debreux, M., Gastineau, K. A., Goodwin, A. K., & Narisetti, L. (2023). Critical examination of resilience and resistance in African American families: Adaptive capacities to navigate toxic oppressive upstream waters. *Development and Psychopathology*, 35(5), 2113–2131.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/s0954579423001037>

- Myers, C. A., Negy, C., & Meehan, D. C. M. (2005). Caucasian American culture: Contemporary identity, challenges, and clinical implications. *PsycInfo Database*.
<https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2005-15744-003>
- Ng, J., Ntoumanis, N., Ntoumanis, C., Deci, E., & Williams, G. (2012). SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY APPLIED TO HEALTH CONTEXTS: a META-ANALYSIS. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, 43.
<https://espace.curtin.edu.au/handle/20.500.11937/53745>
- Nguyen, H. A., Yokozawa, K., & Suárez-Barraza, M. F. (2023). A sense of urgency as a driver of individual kaizen performance: moderating role of organizational culture. *The TQM Journal*, 36(6), 1442–1459. <https://doi.org/10.1108/tqm-06-2023-0169>
- Ospina-Romero, A. M., & Pardo-Torres, M. P. (2024). The Meaning of the Future For Adolescent Mothers: A Grounded Theory study. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.16665>
- Pellegrino, C. (2015). *The lived experiences of teenage mothers that fostered resiliency*.
<https://doi.org/10.17760/d20018699>
- Pirog, M. A., Jung, H., & Lee, D. (2017). The Changing Face of Teenage Parenthood in the United States: Evidence from NLSY79 and NLSY97. *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 47(3), 317–342. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-017-9417-y>
- Plaza, R. M. T., Gorgod, K. D., Madamba, J. M. L., Teves, L. L., & Ederio, N. T. (2024). Lived Experiences of Adolescent Mothers in their Transition to Motherhood in a Rural Barangay. *International Journal of Current Science Research and Review*, 07(05).
<https://doi.org/10.47191/ijcsrr/v7-i5-68>

- Pomerantz, E. M., Moorman, E. A., & Litwack, S. D. (2007). The how, whom, and why of parents' involvement in children's academic lives: More is not always better. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(3), 373–410. <https://doi.org/10.3102/003465430305567>
- Pottinger, A. M., Boyne, A. S., & Passard, N. N. (2023). Stigma and depression in adolescent mothers – How do types of households influence the mothers' Mental Well-Being? *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 32(11), 3389–3400. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-023-02630-z>
- Powers, M. E., Takagishi, J., Alderman, E. M., Chung, R. J., Grubb, L. K., Lee, J., Upadhy, K. K., Wallace, S. B., Alderman, S. L., Sells, J. M., Glusman, M., Guevara, J. P., Hashikawa, A. N., Miller-Fitzwater, A., Navsaria, D., Nelson, B. B., Shriver, A. E., & Vanderbilt, D. L. (2021). Care of adolescent parents and their children. *PEDIATRICS*, 147(5). <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2021-050919>
- Reading, R. (2010). Teenage pregnancy and social disadvantage: systematic review integrating controlled trials and qualitative studies. *Child Care Health and Development*, 36(2), 297–298. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2214.2010.01071_2.x
- Rea, C. J., & Cox, J. (2021). Social support and depression among adolescent mothers. In *Springer eBooks* (pp. 1–7). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-69909-7_4064-2
- Reeve, J. (2015). Autonomy-Supportive Teaching: What it is, how to do it. In *Springer eBooks* (pp. 129–152). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-630-0_7
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2020). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation from a self-determination theory perspective: Definitions, theory, practices, and future directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 61, 101860. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2020.101860>

- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68–78.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.55.1.68>
- Senkyire, E. K., Boateng, D., Boakye, F. O., Logo, D. D., & Ohaja, M. (2022). Socio-economic factors associated with adolescent pregnancy and motherhood: Analysis of the 2017 Ghana maternal health survey. *PLoS ONE*, 17(12), e0272131.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0272131>
- Severinsen, C., Neely, E., & Hutson, R. (2024). Resisting stigma: the role of online communities in young mothers' successful breastfeeding. *International Breastfeeding Journal*, 19(1).
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s13006-024-00626-z>
- Smiley, Y., Manget, J., Barber, J., Clarence, I., Enwerem, N., Jolda, C., Quinn, P., Wesley, Z. J., White, D., & Chokshi, B. (2023). Social support, resource utilization, and well-being: a survey of adolescent parents in Washington, DC. *BMC Public Health*, 23(1).
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-16185-7>
- Smith, C., Strohschein, L., & Crosnoe, R. (2018). Family histories and teen pregnancy in the United States and Canada. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 80(5), 1244–1258.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12512>
- Smith, E. P., Yzaguirre, M. M., Dwanyen, L., & Wieling, E. (2022). Culturally relevant parenting approaches among African American and Latinx children and families: toward resilient, Strengths-Based, Trauma-Informed practices. *Adversity and Resilience Science*, 3(3), 209–224. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42844-022-00059-9>

- Smith, J. A. (2008). Reflecting on the development of interpretative phenomenological analysis and its contribution to qualitative research in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 1(1), 39–54. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088704qp0040a>
- Smith, J. A., & Fieldsend, M. (2021). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In *American Psychological Association eBooks* (pp. 147–166). <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000252-008>
- Teixeira, P. J., Carraça, E. V., Markland, D., Silva, M. N., & Ryan, R. M. (2012). Exercise, physical activity, and self-determination theory: A systematic review. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 9(1), 78. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1479-5868-9-78>
- Torres, A. J. C., Barbosa-Silva, L., Oliveira-Silva, L. C., Miziara, O. P. P., Guahy, U. C. R., Fisher, A. N., & Ryan, M. K. (2024). The Impact of Motherhood on Women’s Career Progression: A Scoping Review of Evidence-Based Interventions. *Behavioral Sciences*, 14(4), 275. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs14040275>
- Van Dinther, M., Dochy, F., & Segers, M. (2010). Factors affecting students’ self-efficacy in higher education. *Educational Research Review*, 6(2), 95–108. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2010.10.003>
- Vansteenkiste, M., & Ryan, R. M. (2013). On psychological growth and vulnerability: Basic psychological need satisfaction and need frustration as a unifying principle. *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, 23(3), 263–280. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a003235>
- Wall-Wieler, E., Lee, J. B., Nickel, N., & Roos, L. L. (2019). The multigenerational effects of adolescent motherhood on school readiness: A population-based retrospective cohort study. *PLoS ONE*, 14(2), e0211284. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0211284>
- Watts, M. C. N. C., Liamputtong, P., & McMichael, C. (2015). Early motherhood: a qualitative study exploring the experiences of African Australian teenage mothers in greater

Melbourne, Australia. *BMC Public Health*, 15(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-015-2215-2>

Weigold, I. K., Weigold, A., Dykema, S. A., Drakeford, N. M., & Ethridge, E. T. (2024). Personal Growth Initiative: relation to coping styles, strategies, and Self-Efficacy. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 25(6). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-024-00782-3>

Appendix A -

These are the interview questions for the study.

1. How was your life like before you became a mother?
2. How did things change for you after you became pregnant?
3. Walk me through how you became a career woman. Talk about the barriers or obstacles you had to overcome and ways in which you overcame them.
4. Tell me about the kind of support you received during that time, be it from family, friends, organizations or government assistants that helped you in your journey.
5. In your journey from being a teenage mother to becoming the woman you are now; how did you balance the demands of motherhood with the demands of education and career aspirations?
6. If you were given the chance to address a teenage mother today what would your message be? Talk about ways you think they can become successful women like you've become