

Fighting the stigma: Tales of teen moms

Manila Bulletin · 13 May 2018 · 1 · By RIA FERNANDEZ YOUNG BUT READY -- Sabrina Lopamia takes care of her youngest child Naomi before going to work. (Jansen Romero)

“Hindi porke batang ina ka stop na yung buhay mo dun, dun ka nalang. (Not because you are a teen mother, your life is over.)”



So says Maphil Sungahid when asked how she is doing as a teen mother.

Sungahil has been a family planning advocate since she was 12. At 17, however, she unexpectedly became a mom.

The irony of her life cost her her confidence as she disappointed people who looked up to her.

“Nung nalaman ng mga kapitbahay ko na buntis ako, sabi nila ‘ay nag-tuturo yan ng sex education tapos ganyan’... Kahit sa Likhaan nung tinanong nila ako kung bakit ko ‘to ginawa, wala akong kwento kasi hindi ako confident sa sarili ko nung mga panahong iyon, (When our neighbors learned I was pregnant, they said ‘she is into sex education yet that’s what happened to her.’... even at Likhaan, when people asked why I did it, I kept mum because I was not confident with myself on those day),” she explains.

But Sungahil drew strength from her child. She faced criticisms and decided to stand up alone.

She was an undergraduate who tried her hand on all manner of jobs, including working in a club, to support her daughter.

Until the right time came for her to return to her true passion — as community mobilizer in Likhaan, a nongovernment organization that provides free sex education and reproductive health services.

Almost every day, Sungahil goes out on field where she shares to the youth her experience of getting pregnant young and unprepared.

This also enabled her to guide her daughter well, who is now 12 years old.

She says: “Nandudoon kami sa hindi porket tinuruan namin kayo paano hindi mabuntis, wag sana. Hangga’t kaya niyong pigilan, pigilan niyo...yung sex nandiyan lang yan e pero yung kung ano ang mawawala pag nakipagtalik ka ng walang proteksyon? Sasagot yan sila ‘Ma’am kinabukasan, pangarap sa buhay’.

So yan dapat maging inspirasyon niyo. (I told them that not because we had taught them how to avoid pregnancy they could have sex when they pleased. Sex is just there, but what do you risk losing when you engage in unprotected sex? They would answer ‘Ma’am, our future, dreams.’ So I told them that should be your inspiration).”

Because of this, Sungahil has learned, albeit the hard way, that one’s failure in the past could be a source of courage and inspiration.

“Hindi porke batang ina ka stop na yung buhay mo dun, dun ka nalang. Hindi dapat, kasi mahaba yung panahon, marami ka pang magagawa. Sa isang pagkakamali pwede ko namang ituwid ‘yun, (Not because you are a teen mother, your life is over. It shouldn’t because you have so much time, so many opportunities to correct a mistake),” she says.

Achieving dreams

Another similar case is Sabrina Lopamia. She had been a teen mother not once, but twice.

She was 14 and 16 when she had her babies from different fathers.

Determined to finish her studies despite what happened, Sabrina did not allow people’s judgment to affect her.

She graduated from high school. Years later, she took a course on food and beverage services at the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority or TESDA.

Now, Sabrina, 22, works at a five-star hotel in Makati.

She has also built a happy family of her own with the father of her second child.

“Kung nag-decide po ako dati na ‘di tuparin ang pangarap ko at mag-stick lang po ako sa bahay namin, maibibigay ko pa po ba yung pangarap ng mga anak ko? Pan-

garap ko? Hindi na.(If I had decided then to not pursue my ambitions and just stay at the house, would I have been able to fulfill the dreams of my children? How about my dreams? Not any more.)

So, I plan na mag-aral then tuparin ko pa rin mga pangarap ko kahit nagkaanak ako ng maaga (So, I plan to study and fulfill my dreams, even if I had children at a young age),” says Sabrina.

Better person

Meanwhile, Dennise Gacutan, 19, just recently gave birth to a bouncing baby boy. And, like other teen moms, she says she was scared at first.

But as her son grows, so does she. She says motherhood is life-changing. It has turned her into a selfless person.

“I have become patient. I do everything to make my son’s life better. I promise to work hard for his future,” says Gacutan in Filipino.

Asked what message she can impart to other teen moms who might have a feeling of regret, she says, “Dapat po maging proud pa po sila sa pagkakaroon ng baby. Tsaka ‘wag po nilang ikahiya kasi ibinigay po ito kasi ng Diyos. (You should be proud of having a baby. Do not be ashamed since the baby was a gift from God.)”

Support to teen moms

Although stigma on early pregnancy still exists today given a Catholic-dominated Philippines, there is a noticeable difference between how the public look at teen motherhood at present and in the past. More people now seem to be more accepting, acknowledging that being a young mom is not a death sentence.

The government has taken steps to support teen mothers who are usually disadvantaged.

For one, public schools are prohibited to kick-out pregnant students. “They will be given modules, then they can go back to school. They will not be dropped,” says Rosalie Masilang, assistant chief of DepEd-Bureau of Curriculum Development. TESDA, on the other hand, put up a day-care center where their studentmothers can leave their kids while studying. Meanwhile, a bill aimed at ensuring access of teen parents to opportunities and services is being pushed at the Senate.

Not because you are a teen mother, your life is over. It shouldn’t because you have so much time, so many opportunities to correct a mistake. —Maphil Sungahid