

## Adolescent Father's Needs, Attitudes and Beliefs Regarding Fatherhood in Freetown, Sierra Leone: A Case of Adonkia Community

Moses Abdul Fullah<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

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The purpose of this study was to explore the needs, attitudes and beliefs of adolescent fathers in Freetown. Specifically, phenomenological methods were used to capture the essence of these teenage fathers' experiences related to their conceptualization and acceptance of fatherhood. Participants ranged from 16 to 19 years, the overall age distribution shows that participants are relatively spread across the age groups, but 17-year-olds dominate the sample. Their perspective adds to the current literature and helps other researchers and policymakers better understand the needs and perceptions of this marginalized group. The transformation process best describes the experiences of these teenage fathers. Fatherhood was described as a life-changing event as they overcame a range of negative behaviors and became actively involved fathers. Although the results cannot be generalized, the stories of these participants provide insight into this marginalized population. These participants defined fatherhood in traditional terms (i.e., the father as the primary breadwinner) and expressed enthusiasm for being actively involved in their children's daily lives. In addition, most said they are renewing their focus on improving education to ensure a better future for themselves and their children. Although participants received help from their families, there was no support from the educational system but they cannot support with their education due to the added burden created by these teenage fathers. There is a need for further research regarding the needs of teenage fathers. A longitudinal study with these participants is needed to explore how they enacted their concept of fatherhood and what barriers they encountered.

**Keywords:** Fatherhood, Adolescent, Attitudes, Parenthood, Family

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### 1. Introduction

The issues surrounding adolescent fatherhood are complex and require more careful study. This request must include the voice of the teenage father. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of literature focusing on the lived experiences of teenage fathers, resulting in their marginalization. In addition, community-based services (Miller, 1997) and educational services (Lane & Clay, 2000) are also lacking for this population. The lack of empirical research and programs tailored to teenage fathers affects more than just teen parents and their offspring. Teen parenting is an issue of national importance because of the costs associated with it due to the lack of education of teen parents and the cycle of poverty that often accompanies this population (Jordan-Zachery, 2009; Paschal, 2006; Weinman, Smith, & Buzi, 2002). Becoming a public concern in the 1970s, research related to adolescent parenting has focused on the mother and adolescent child (Furstenberg, 1985; Paschal, 2006; Pirog-Good, 1995; Rozie-Battle, 2003). It was only in the 1990s that the role of the teenage father in the family began to be reflected in literature. Some of the earlier research reflected public perceptions that parenting by adolescents, especially teenage fathers, operates in the realm of deviant behavior, and pregnancy is a symptom of such behavior (Furstenberg, 1985; Paschal, 2006).

In Sierra Leone, adolescent fathers were often blamed for being absent or uninvolved in a parent's life, placing the burden of raising their children on the teenage mother and society at large. While this may be true for some teenage fathers, a review of recent literature shows that many have expressed a desire to care for their children. While society as a whole advocates for adult fathers to be actively involved in their children's lives, the image of the teenage father continues to be defined by negative stereotypes. Unfortunately, the literature written before the 1990s that focused on teenage fathers did little to change the prevailing opinions associated with this population. Indeed, early research focused on negative portrayals of teenage fathers. Despite these stereotypes, there is growing evidence that teenage fathers want to (and are involved with) their children, although this

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<sup>1</sup> Lecturer, Department of Sociology and Social Work, Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone.

involvement may not always include financial support (Allen & Doherty, 1996). Evidence suggests that many teenage fathers are actively involved and invested in the daily care of their offspring (Dornig et al., 2006; Sullivan, 1989).

On the path to parenthood, a teenage father faces many visible and invisible challenges. For example, teenage fathers are often unfairly compared to older married fathers and unfairly stereotyped when they do not live up to these comparisons (Allen & Doherty, 1996; Gavin, 2002).

## 2. Statement of the Problem

The journey from adolescence to adulthood is considered a stressful and challenging time; Adding fatherhood to this transition period significantly increases the pressure on teenage fathers (Rosey-Battle, 2003). Understanding how teenage fathers experience fatherhood is vital for those working in educational and community settings to better support them during the difficult transition to parenthood. For many teenage fathers, the need for employment comes at the expense of his educational needs. Without achieving minimum educational requirements, they lack marketable skills and face a life of lower wages, higher unemployment, and greater risk of criminal activity (Pirogue-Good, 1995).

Teenage fathers are a vulnerable population with many characteristics similar to those of teenage mothers (Lemay et al 2010:221). The extent to which a young man is prepared to become a father and to participate in fathering activities usually depends on how he perceives the role of the father (Paschal et al 2011:63). The transition from childhood to adulthood takes different forms in different societies; therefore, understanding the difficulties boys experience in becoming men must take into account their needs, attitudes and beliefs about fatherhood (Lemay et al 2010: 222). Understanding how teenage fathers feel about their role is influenced by considering their needs and beliefs about the situation.

Early parenthood is a growing problem in Sierra Leone. Statistics indicate that around 12% of adolescents aged 15-19 are already parents or pregnant, with a significant number of these individuals being teenage fathers. Research shows that early fatherhood contributes to higher dropout rates among boys, with many leaving formal education prematurely to enter informal livelihoods (Sierra Leone Demographic and Health Survey, 2019). Researchers, organizations and government policies have focused on early motherhood to the neglect of the opposite sex. Most boys dropped out of school due to early fatherhood. Most of them move into informal livelihoods at an early age due to early parenthood and this has an adverse negative impact on boys in Sierra Leone. Due to the paucity of research on this perennial issue, the study aims to bring a social work insight on the research gaps surrounding the needs, views and beliefs of teenage fathers regarding fatherhood in Freetown Sierra Leone.

## Research Objectives

1. To explore the lived experiences of adolescent fathers in Adonkia, Freetown, regarding their needs, attitudes, and beliefs about fatherhood.
2. To identify the challenges and barriers faced by adolescent fathers in fulfilling their roles as parents.
3. To examine the impact of early fatherhood on the educational and economic opportunities of adolescent fathers.

## Research Questions

1. What are the personal experiences of adolescent fathers in Adonkia related to their roles as fathers?
2. What challenges do adolescent fathers in Adonkia encounter in their day-to-day parenting responsibilities?
3. What effects does early fatherhood have on the educational pursuits and economic opportunities of adolescent fathers in Adonkia?

## 3. Literature Review

A review of the literature confirms the need for continued research to better understand the phenomenon of teenage fatherhood. Unfortunately, negative stereotypes and marginalization dominate studies completed before the 1990s. This led to a decline in research and limited social service agencies and schools typically devote more resources to the child and mother to the exclusion of the adolescent father (Allen & Doherty, 1996). However, it is through better understanding that negative stereotypes associated with this population can be eliminated and its unique needs addressed. Continued research on teenage fathers will provide research to support expanded services from community agencies and educational institutions to better meet the needs of this population.

Before the surge in research in the 1990s, few articles focused on teenage fathers and even fewer focused on developmental differences between this population and other fathers (e.g., residential, divorced, separated fathers). Adolescent fathers have been viewed as the neglected parent by researchers (Barret & Robinson, 1986; Rivara, 1981), stereotyped by practitioners as an irresponsible parent (Miller, 1997), ignored by social work professionals (Miller, 1997), and viewed as delinquent by outsiders. politicians (Miller, 1997; Paschal, 2006). Early research on teenage fathers even suggested that teenage fathers were psychologically unstable (Glickman, 2004). Despite recent literature challenging stereotypes, myths surrounding the teenage father remain (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Doring et al., 2006; Nelson, 2004). Since the 1990s, the number of professional journals publishing articles on fatherhood has increased. Emphasizing the importance of this topic, several journals have devoted special issues to the study of fatherhood, namely *Families in Society* (1993), *Journal of Family Studies* (1993, 1994, 1999), *Demography* (1998), *Journal of Men's Studies* (1998), *Journal of Family History* (2000) and *Marriage and Family Review* (2000). Literature has transformed the teenage father from a marginalized parent into a recognized piece of the complex puzzle that makes up the phenomenon of raising teen children. It was also effective in facilitating higher quality research, leading to deeper exploration of the adolescent father's worldview and developmental needs.

The growth of qualitative research in recent years has facilitated the exploration of the thoughts, perceptions, concerns, and fears of the teenage father. Research by Sullivan (1989) and Paschal (2006) suggests that teenage fathers may lack the developmental tools, finances, and experience of more experienced fathers; however, he expresses a desire to be actively involved in his child's life. The use of qualitative research helped challenge long-held negative stereotypes and advanced the definition of fatherhood to include a generative perspective, thereby providing the opportunity for teenage fathers to add their narrative to the body of literature.

### 3.1 What is a father?

There is no universally accepted definition of fatherhood, just as there is no universally accepted definition of what it means to be a father. Historically, the father was considered the head of the family and the primary breadwinner in the family (Lamb, 2000). While this father role may be predominant, it is neither one-dimensional nor historically accurate for all fathers. This is an important point because many teenage fathers model adult fathers on this restrictive definition of fatherhood (Paschal, 2006). Unfortunately, one of the predictors of teenage father involvement is the ability to provide financial support (Paschal, 2006; Wilkinson, Magora, Garcia, & Khurana, 2009). If the adolescent father is unable to meet these needs, he withdraws completely from involvement in his child's life (Lamb, 2000; Paschal, 2006).

The literature review highlights four social trends that have changed family structure, namely, dual-income families, variation in father involvement, the increase in residential fathers, and minority cultural child-rearing practices (Cabrera, Tamis-Lemonda, Hoffert and Lamb, 2000). Some scholars go even further, suggesting that these trends have caused fundamental changes in their family structure. These four trends have shifted our view of fathering from a traditional model (e.g., head of household, primary breadwinner) to a generative perspective, which refers to the actions the father takes to improve the child and future generations (Hernandez, 2002; Summers et al., 2006). This perspective provides a more realistic approach to fatherhood based on contextual circumstances, including employment status and monetary resources (Wilkinson et al., 2009).

### 3.2 Fatherhood as a multifaceted construct

The concept of fatherhood has grown immeasurably during the 20th century due to the contributions of the above-mentioned social trends. This growth has prompted social science researchers to find the most appropriate concept of fatherhood. A major issue in seeking consensus has been whether the concept of fatherhood is unidimensional or multidimensional (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000).

Although the literature has begun to reflect fatherhood as a multifaceted concept, research has shown that many teenage fathers hold a traditional view that limits fatherhood to the concept of being the breadwinner. Although the multifaceted construct is more realistic for the teenage father, the traditional model remains ingrained in our society (Lamb, 2000). It's no surprise that a teenage father embraces the breadwinner concept of fatherhood. Peer pressure and religious ideology continue to identify the man as the head of the family (Paschal, 2006). The mixed messages are confusing as even academic scholars struggle to define the concept of parenthood (Lamb, 2000).

Although Lamb (2000) defined fatherhood as a multifaceted construct, he recognized that one theme may have been more dominant than others at different times in history. Based on this theory, four historical phases of fatherhood and father involvement are distinguished to illustrate fatherhood as a multifaceted construct, but with each period occupying a distinct phase of dominance (for example, the father as moral teacher in colonial times). Lamb's phases of fatherhood are identified as Moral Teacher, Provider, Same-Sex Role Model, and New Nurturing Father (see Table 2.2). Lamb (2000) traced fatherhood from the colonial period to the period of

centralized industrialization, where he identified the dominant theme of this period as the father as moral guide. This period was followed by the father as the breadwinner and lasted until the Great Depression. Lamb identified the third phase of fatherhood as the same-sex role model, which acknowledged the father as a financial and moral mentor, but primarily focused on him being a strong role model, especially for his son. This phase began after the Second World War and led to the father becoming a teacher. This fourth stage, the New Nurturing Father, began around the mid-1970s and defined the father's growth as active and willing to participate in the day-to-day activities of child rearing.

### 3.3 Phases of Fatherhood (Lamb, 2000)

Historical Period	Phases of Fatherhood and Father Involvement
Colonial period to Industrialization	Moral Teacher
Industrialization to Great Depression	Breadwinner
Following WWII	Same-Sex Role Model
Mid-1970s to present	New Nurturing Father

Conversely, Marcillo et al (2000) divided these phases into specific periods where one motive was dominant, but suggested that other roles coexisted simultaneously. For example, the economic breadwinner has historically played an important role in the role of the father, just as fathers have always considered themselves the primary breadwinner and role model for their gender. Recent literature supports Marcillo's view of fatherhood as a multifaceted construct in which different themes exist simultaneously. Qualitative studies by Pascal (2006) and Sullivan (1989) suggest that fathers, especially teenage fathers, use each theme in defining their vision of fatherhood. Fathers describe themselves as feeling responsible for the moral character of their family, providing financial support and being actively involved in raising their children. By hearing from fathers themselves, rather than relying on stereotypes, we can assume that some teenage fathers recognize the importance of making multiple contributions to their child's life.

### 3.4 Redefining fatherhood

Teen fathers may not be the only ones benefiting from the expanded definition of paternity. Based on the four social trends presented in Table 2.1, expanded concepts of fatherhood, developmental considerations, and an increase in the amount of literature published during

In the 1990s, scholars began to develop more complex concepts of fatherhood (Bruce & Fox, 1997; Lamb, 2000; Lamb, 1997; Pleck & Pleck, 1997). Recent literature reflects attempts by scholars to redefine participation as a multifaceted construct reflecting a wide range of activities (Almeida, Wethington and McDonald, 2001; King et al., 2004; M Lamb, 2000). This paves the way for a more mature and comprehensive conceptualization of what is meant by involvement involving child and father development (Pleck & Pleck, 1997). These conceptualizations benefit the teenage father as he attempts to make sense of fatherhood and adolescence. A teenage father's lack of involvement may not be intentionally ignoring his child; instead, his behavior may be developmentally consistent with that of an adolescent.

Various terms have been used to describe who and what the father is (see Table 2.3). Regardless of the terms used, each of these perspectives has expanded the definition of fatherhood into a multifaceted and generative construct. Scientists are increasingly viewing fatherhood, especially teenage fatherhood, from a generative perspective due to its multifaceted and developmental properties. Although there is no consensus on how the generative perspective is operationalized (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 1998), scholars recognize that it focuses on the father's positive contributions (Almeida et al., 2001). Further distancing itself from the deficit perspective, the generative perspective includes the nonresident parent and other nontraditional fathers, such as teenage fathers, in the discussion of fatherhood (Almeida et al., 2001; Marsiglio et al., 2000; McLanahan, Garfinkel) . , Reichman & Teitler, 2001 ).

### 3.5 Terms Used in the Literature Related to Father

Authors	Terms	Foci
Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson (1998)	good father	Identify the multilevel approach to parenting
Hawkins & Palkovitz (1999)	father work	Broadening the scope of fatherhood
Almeida, Wethington, & McDonald (2001)	new fatherhood	Father's nurturing activities
Summers, Boller, Schiffman, & Raikes (2006)	good father	Generative approach to how a father should act

Under the generative umbrella, a father undertakes many actions for the benefit of his child and future generations (Summers et al., 2006). The ability to perform a variety of responsibilities has led researchers to seek a more appropriate definition to accommodate the father's varied activities. This new direction has been labeled with terms such as new fatherhood (Almeida et al., 2001) or good father (Doherty, Kuneski, & Erickson, 1998). At the same time, the new movement continues to coexist with those who limit fatherhood to the traditional model of the father as breadwinner and head of the family (Lamb, 2000; Marsiglio et al., 2000).

Increased attention to this generative perspective has led scholars to seek new parenting terminology that would appropriately describe this new fatherhood and be more consistent with the parenting activities of the father (Almeida et al., 2001). Doherty, Kuneski, and Erickson (1998) used the term "good fathering" to refer to a multilevel approach to parenting. Perhaps more importantly, the term reflected a shift from the traditional view, which limited fathers to the role of financial providers to someone who shared child-rearing responsibilities with their partner. Other scholars have sought new terminology to not only address changing public perceptions of fathering roles, but also to highlight the growing research focus on how father involvement influences the quality of the father-child relationship. Hawkins and Palkowitz (1999) view this generative perspective as a means of harnessing the developmental benefits of fathers becoming more involved in their children's lives. They acknowledged that nonresident father participation was not adequately included in the study. Since the primary measure of father involvement was time spent at home, researchers began to question whether the contribution of non-resident fathers was adequately measured. To reach this growing segment of fathers, they have expanded the definition of fathering to include different family structures (e.g., residential, nonresidential), different cultures, and added value to previously neglected parenting activities (e.g., cognitive and affective components).

As the generative perspective has evolved, researchers have added nuance to the existing literature by examining the environmental factors that influence the level of father involvement. Doherty et al (1998) recognized that contextual features (e.g., relationship with co-parent), as well as environmental factors (e.g., poverty) and cultural considerations strongly influenced acceptance of parenthood. In addition, other factors also influenced the father's ability to realize his vision of being a good father, such as his relationship with his own father, his age, his employment status, and his relationship with the child's mother and maternal family.

### 3.6 What is a Teen Father?

Teen fathers are more likely to come from low-income communities and live in disadvantaged communities (Pirogue-Good, 1995). They are also more likely to drop out of high school and earn less money over the course of their lives than their childless peers (Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Glikman, 2004). They are more likely to come from families where their parents were also young parents (Christmon, 1990b; King et al., 2004; Thornberry, Smith, & Howard, 1997). Pirogue-Good (1995) noted that 45% of teenage fathers come from single-parent families. In most cases, these patterns extend beyond the family and affect community stability (Wilkinson et al., 2009). The stereotypical image of the teenage father is inconsistent with previous research. Regardless of socioeconomic background or age, many teenage fathers express a desire to be involved in their child's life (Paschal, 2006). Despite developmental maturity (Applegate, 1988) and inability to provide traditional financial support (Futris & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2007), researchers indicate that the teenage father's conceptualization of fatherhood is similar to that of the older married father to whom he is often compared.

The best person to tell us about a teenage father is the teenage father himself. Qualitative data from numerous studies detail teenage fathers' desire to be an actively involved parent. This is illustrated in the works of Sullivan (1989), Dornig et al. (2006) and Pascal (2006). The authors clearly state that there are teenage fathers who are not involved and do not have the inclination or maturity to raise their children. However, the majority of teenage fathers in every study expressed a desire to take on the role of parent and be responsible for their child.

### 3.7 Outcome of Adolescent Parenting

Parenting teenagers usually involves negative consequences for both parents and the child. However, scientists are less clear on whether the consequences of teenage parenting are more severe after the child is born or whether they are a symptom of larger problems that precede parenthood. Futris et al. (2010) suggested that teenage fathers face greater challenges after childbirth because parenting during adolescence negatively impacts the future success of the parents and their child. Coley and Chase-Lansdale (1998) concur, citing higher dropout rates among teenage parents, resulting in low-income employment.

However, there are scientists who suggest that negative outcomes precede the birth of a child. The literature suggests that young people already in poverty or disadvantage are more likely to become teenage parents, and early parenthood simply continues the cycle of poverty (Paschal, 2006). Those who support (Xie, Cairns, & Cairns, 2001) this view believe that adolescents who become parents already face challenges related to home instability, poverty, low self-esteem, and academic difficulties. Xie et al. (2001) argued that becoming a parent during adolescence can lead to increased poverty, but many teenage parents come from low-income communities. Thornberry et al (1997) used data from Rochester Youth Development, an ongoing study of adolescents, to determine the prevalence of teenage fatherhood in a sample of 615 adolescent men and their families. Their research supports the view that parenting during adolescence is a byproduct of larger problems. One of the goals of their study was to discover the antecedent characteristics of teenage fathers. Results showed that being a racial or ethnic minority, engaging in deviant behavior, and coming from a structurally disadvantaged family increased the risk of becoming a teen parent.

Mercer Sullivan's (1989) study in three different areas demonstrated resource disparities and how they impact teenage fathers. Those who have additional family support, local resources, and community programs fare better than those who receive limited assistance. Caucasian teenage fathers living in an area with higher home ownership rates, more local businesses, and more income from public programs fared better than their minority counterparts. Without these resources, fathers in the other two areas struggled to realize their vision of fatherhood. These findings suggest that adolescent parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds face greater challenges in addition to challenges associated with supporting the child. Regardless of a parent's racial background, teen parents and their children face significant challenges. Hernandez's (2002) literature review cites Maynard's (1997) work on the effects of teenage pregnancy. Maynard's work showed that teenage birth led to many negative trends for the mother, father, and child. Maynard compared the results of adolescents who have children before age 18 with those who wait until age 21. Although all the results for teen parents and their offspring are not harmful, many have negative consequences. The consequences of early parenthood are more negative for those who become parents at an earlier age.

In general, the outcomes of early parenthood have negative effects on all parties (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, 1998). The child is more likely to have health problems (such as asthma) and is more likely to be abused by a parent or other family member. Male children are three times more likely to face imprisonment during their lifetime. Teen mothers are more likely to remain unmarried than their peers, who delay childbirth and are more likely to receive public assistance. They also struggle to maintain employment, which contributes to higher poverty rates. A teenage father earns less in his lifetime than his peers who are delaying fatherhood. This often coincides with lower academic achievement due to them being more likely to drop out of school than their peers.

### 3.8 Needs Of Adolescent Fathers

Adolescent fathers often face unique challenges that differ from their adult counterparts. Key needs identified in the literature include:

**Emotional Support:** Adolescent fathers frequently report feelings of isolation and uncertainty. Research by Kaba (2015) highlights that young fathers in Sierra Leone often lack emotional support systems to help them navigate the complexities of fatherhood. They need access to peer support groups and counseling services to address their emotional and psychological needs.

**Financial Stability:** The financial burden of parenthood is a significant concern for adolescent fathers. According to Morris (2014), many young fathers are not adequately prepared for the economic responsibilities that come with raising a child. They require vocational training and employment opportunities to support their families.

**Education and Knowledge:** There is a pressing need for educational resources on parenting and child development. Bensimon (2017) emphasizes that many adolescent fathers lack access to information that can help them understand their roles and responsibilities. Programs focusing on parenting skills and reproductive health are essential in addressing these gaps.

### **3.9 Attitudes Towards Fatherhood**

Adolescent fathers' attitudes towards their roles can vary significantly, influenced by cultural expectations and personal experiences:

**Cultural Perceptions:** The cultural framework in Sierra Leone often idealizes fatherhood as a role of authority and provision. Mikell (1997) notes that young fathers may feel pressured to conform to traditional gender roles, which can lead to conflicting emotions regarding their capabilities and responsibilities.

**Paternal Identity:** Research indicates that adolescent fathers often struggle with their identity as parents. Many express a desire to be involved but feel unprepared or unsupported. Kaba (2015) found that young fathers exhibit a strong willingness to engage in their children's lives, but they also experience anxiety about their parenting skills.

**Social Stigmatization:** Adolescent fathers may face social stigma that affects their self-perception and involvement with their children. Morris (2014) highlights that societal attitudes can lead to feelings of inadequacy and reduce their motivation to participate actively in parenting.

## **4. Beliefs Regarding Fatherhood**

The beliefs that adolescent fathers hold about fatherhood significantly impact their parenting behaviors and interactions with their children:

**Beliefs about Responsibility:** Many young fathers believe that their primary role is to provide financially for their children. This belief can lead to neglect of emotional and nurturing aspects of parenting. Bensimon (2017) emphasizes that while financial support is important, emotional involvement is equally critical for child development.

**Expectations of Fatherhood:** Mikell (1997) notes that adolescent fathers often have unrealistic expectations about the ease of parenting, which can lead to disillusionment. Comprehensive education on the realities of fatherhood can help shift these beliefs towards a more balanced understanding of the role.

**Impact of Peer Influence:** The influence of peers can shape adolescent fathers' beliefs about fatherhood. Kaba (2015) found that young fathers often look to their peers for guidance and validation, which can either positively or negatively affect their parenting practices.

## **4.0 Research Methodology**

This study utilized a qualitative research approach, focusing on a phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences, attitudes, and beliefs of adolescent fathers in Adonkia, Freetown, Sierra Leone. The methodology aimed to capture the essence of fatherhood as perceived by this marginalized group. The section below details the research design, sampling, data collection methods, and analysis procedures.

### **4.1 Study design**

The study employed a phenomenological research design, as it seeks to understand and describe participants' lived experiences of fatherhood. This approach is well-suited for capturing the subjective experiences of adolescent fathers, who are often excluded from research and policy discussions. Phenomenology allowed for an in-depth exploration of their emotions, challenges, and transformations, providing insights that statistical methods could not capture.

The researcher used open-ended questions through in-depth interviews, which contributed to a better understanding of the historical and cultural experiences of this population. The use of in-depth interviews provided a wealth of data necessary to better understand the participants' perceptions and experiences as teenage fathers.

### **4.2 Area of research**

The study was conducted in a natural setting; that is, the environment in which the population of interest is located, namely the Adonkia community, Freetown. The area is mainly urban-rural. The target population was

selected from the designated clinic and three high schools in the area through their adolescent partners who attended the health clinic. Participants were invited to the clinic for a focus group discussion and interview.

### **4.3 Population**

The population for this study included male teenage fathers aged 16 to 19 years whose children's mothers were also teenagers. Thus, the target group was middle-aged and older adolescents.

#### **4.3.1 Sample Size and Sampling Method**

Target Population:

The study focused on male teenage fathers aged 16 to 19, whose children's mothers were also teenagers. These participants were selected for their ability to provide firsthand insights into the challenges and beliefs associated with early fatherhood.

Sampling Method:

A purposive sampling technique was employed to ensure that participants met specific criteria: being teenage fathers actively involved in their children's lives. This method allowed for the intentional selection of participants with rich and relevant experiences.

Sample Size:

The study included 8 participants. This size aligns with qualitative research standards, prioritizing depth over breadth to ensure detailed, nuanced data collection.

### **4.4 Data Collection**

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews to allow participants to freely share their experiences while ensuring that key research questions were addressed. The interview guide included open-ended questions designed to explore:

1. Personal experiences with fatherhood.
2. Challenges encountered in fulfilling parental roles.
3. Impact of fatherhood on education and economic opportunities.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were also conducted to supplement the interviews, providing a platform for participants to discuss common challenges and strategies in a group setting. The combination of methods ensured data triangulation and a richer understanding of the phenomenon. To enhance reliability, the interviews were conducted in Krio (local language) and English, depending on participants' preferences, and later translated into English for analysis.

### **4.5 Data Analysis**

The data that emerged from the descriptions given by the participants during interviews had to be reported exactly as described by participants. After collection of data, the recordings were listened to, and verbatim statements made by respondents were transcribed. The researcher immersed himself in the data to identify and write down meaningful statements relevant to the purpose and objectives of the study as expressed by the participants during the interviews. Similar data were categorised in categories and themes, during analysis, utmost care was taken not to lose data as data were interlinked.

### **4.6 Presentation and analysis of results**

The purpose of this study was to explore the needs, experiences, attitudes and beliefs of teenage fathers in Adonkia, Freetown. The results of the study are based on the analysis of data obtained from semi-structured interviews conducted with teenage fathers. The research questions focused on the life experiences of a teenage father, capturing the essence of the participant's views and behaviors as a father. The data sources were teenage fathers living in the Adonkia community in rural western Freetown Sierra Leone.

However, the researcher followed Creswell's (2007) approach to enhance the validity and reliability of the study. This process included distilling my personal knowledge of the phenomenon, re-reading the transcripts to identify



significant statements, developing meaning clusters from the significant statements, extracting significant themes relevant to the research questions, and developing the essence of the teenage father's life experiences. Credibility was established through participant checks to ensure accuracy of data interpretation. As noted earlier, setting aside my personal feelings was vital to capturing the essence of the teenage father's life experience. After completing the first three interviews in July 2023, the researchers transcribed them verbatim and reviewed the transcripts for accuracy. The contents were read several times to identify important statements from the interviews.

The second round of interviews concluded in August 2023 and analysis was completed using a paper-based protocol. After completion of the second round, the initial round of interviews was included and all interview transcripts were re-read. Additional significant statements were identified and coded.

#### 4.7 Chronological Age distributions of participants

Detailed Analysis:

Chronological age	Participants (n- 13)	%
16 years	2	25
17 years	3	38
18 years	1	12
19 years	2	25
<b>Total</b>	8	100

##### 4.7.1 Age Distribution:

Balanced participation across three ages: The ages 16, 17, and 19 show a fairly even distribution of participants, with 16-year-olds and 19-year-olds each representing 25% of the sample. Participants aged 17 are slightly more prevalent at 38%, which makes them the most represented group. Only one participant (12%) falls into the 18-year-old category. This age group is notably underrepresented compared to the others, which could indicate a gap in participation from this specific age or possibly reflect demographic factors affecting the participant pool.

##### Dominant Age Group:

17-year-old (38%): This group makes up the highest percentage, with 3 participants. This suggests that the study has a stronger representation from this age group, which could skew results if age is an important variable in the analysis. The overall age distribution shows that participants are relatively spread across the age groups, but 17-year-olds dominate the sample.

#### 4.8 Living Arrangements of Participants

Living arrangements	Participants	% (100%)
Living with mother	2	25
Living with father	2	25
Living with both parents	3	37
Living Alone	1	13
<b>Total</b>	8	100

##### Analysis

The majority of participants (37%) live with both parents when they became fathers, making it the most common living arrangement in the group. Equal proportions (25%) of participants live with either their mother or father, suggesting a significant number of individuals are in single-parent households. A smaller percentage (13%) of participants live alone, indicating this is the least common living arrangement.

The total number of participants is 8, and the percentages add up to 100%, confirming the distribution is accurate. This data indicates a predominance of family-based living situations, particularly with both parents, while living alone is rare in this sample. This piece of information was very key for the researcher, because the dynamics of the living arrangements of the participants helped to provide a clear perspective of the phenomenon.

#### 4.9 Themes emerging from the study

At its core, phenomenological analysis consists of identifying meaningful statements, generating meaningful units, and developing a description that captures the essence of the phenomenon. Themes were used to reflect participants' reflective responses to each of the research questions. These themes led to the formation of what constitutes the essence of the study. The research questions served to describe the teenage father's experiences. Each question played a role in gathering information about the participant's life before fatherhood, his current experiences as a father, and his definition of fatherhood. The following section is organized by research questions and related topics. Quotes from participants are used to give voice to these lived experiences. Where detailed quotations are provided. Coded participant names were chosen by the respective participant to protect their identity.

#### Discussions and Interpretation of findings

The following four themes emerged during data collection and were considered in data analysis:

##### 4.9.1 Diagram of Themes for Teenage Fatherhood

The diagram below illustrates the major themes identified in the analysis of teenage fatherhood experiences. Each theme encompasses multiple sub-themes that reflect the key areas of concern and transformation in the lives of teenage fathers.

#### Themes Overview:

Theme Number	Theme Description
Theme 1	<b>Life Before Becoming a Father:</b> Unpreparedness for Fatherhood, Family Influence, The Child as an Agent of Change
Theme 2	<b>Experiences with Your Child:</b> The Child as an Agent of Change (Reiterated), Fatherly Responsibilities, Active Participation
Theme 3	<b>What Does It Mean to Be a Father?:</b> Provider Role, Family Influence (Reiterated), Active Participation (Reiterated)
Theme 4	<b>Outcome of Adolescent Parenting</b> The psychological and emotional strain, Educational Disruption and Financial Instability, Reliance on Family Support
Theme 5	<b>The Essence of Teenage Fathers' Needs, Attitudes, and Beliefs:</b> Core elements that describe the transformative process of fatherhood and the significance of family and caregiving roles.

#### 4.10 Theme 1: Life Before Becoming a Father

**Unpreparedness for Fatherhood:** Teenage fathers in the study overwhelmingly expressed anxiety and fear upon learning about their impending role as fathers. This reaction was universal, regardless of whether the participants had prior experience in caring for siblings or younger family members. For many, fatherhood brought with it an unexpected weight of responsibility. While some initially felt excitement at the prospect of becoming a father, the dominant sentiment was one of uncertainty and unpreparedness. This feeling is encapsulated in the quote, "I didn't realize how much work it was until I had my own child," which demonstrates that the practical demands of fatherhood were underestimated. This sense of being unprepared reflects not only a lack of practical knowledge but also emotional readiness, which is often complicated by the participants' adolescence and the stage of life they were in. Teenage fathers are navigating major developmental shifts themselves, and adding fatherhood compounds the complexity of those changes.

**Family Influence:** Before becoming fathers, most participants described strained relationships with their parents. These strained relationships often stemmed from behaviors such as rebellion, poor communication, or general emotional distance, as evidenced by descriptions of being "thick-headed" or "immature." However, the anticipation of fatherhood prompted a noticeable shift in these family dynamics. Despite their previously negative

interactions, these young men turned to their families—particularly their parents—for support, advice, and practical assistance. This shift in family dynamics underscores the notion that fatherhood, despite its challenges, served as a bonding agent between generations. The role of parents, particularly fathers and mothers, in mentoring and guiding the participants became a critical source of emotional and practical support. One participant reflected on how his mother became a pillar of support despite his earlier behaviors, highlighting the resilience and flexibility within family relationships.

Family influence not only provided practical advice (e.g., how to handle the responsibilities of fatherhood) but also modeled what fatherhood could look like. Fathers or father figures within the participants' lives played crucial roles in shaping their understanding of responsibility, as one participant recalled his father's advice to "step it up," which translated into increased maturity and accountability.

**The Child as an Agent of Change:** Becoming a father was transformative for the participants, acting as a turning point that shifted their priorities and behaviors. Many fathers described how fatherhood prompted them to abandon negative behaviors such as drinking, truancy, or running away from home. Fatherhood became a motivating force that spurred the young men toward maturity. This theme highlights the power of responsibility in fostering personal growth, even in adolescence, where impulsive behavior and recklessness are often normative. For instance, one participant who had struggled with alcohol addiction described how learning about his upcoming role as a father led him to quit drinking altogether. The child, in essence, became a catalyst for positive behavioral change, symbolizing hope and the need to better oneself in order to provide a stable future for the child.

## Theme 2. Experiences with Their Child

**The Child as an Agent of Change (Reiterated):** The theme of transformation continued as fathers reflected on their current roles and responsibilities. Many fathers recognized that their child's presence in their lives changed their day-to-day activities and outlook on life. Before becoming fathers, their lives were centered around activities typical of teenage boys—socializing, hanging out with friends, or engaging in potentially harmful behaviors. However, with fatherhood came a new focus. Participants described how their time spent on non-constructive activities decreased, while time devoted to studies, work, and caring for their children increased. This transformation was not only practical—learning to manage their time—but also emotional, as fathers realized the depth of their responsibility.

As one father poignantly put it, "I wasn't this person before I had a child," illustrating how the experience of fatherhood fundamentally altered his identity. The process of "growing up" became synonymous with fatherhood, where their child's needs became the focal point of their decision-making.

**Fatherly Responsibilities:** Financial and emotional responsibilities emerged as key concerns among the teenage fathers. Fathers often expressed a strong desire to provide financial support, yet they were acutely aware of their limitations, especially given their age and lack of full-time employment. Despite these limitations, they made efforts to contribute what they could, such as buying essentials like diapers or formula. Fathers also regretted the limited time they could spend with their children due to the demands of school or part-time work, highlighting the tension between their role as students and providers.

For many, fatherhood was a balancing act between meeting financial obligations and being physically present. Some fathers expressed feelings of guilt over not being able to spend as much time with their children as they wanted, particularly when school or work limited their availability. This tension between being a "breadwinner" and a present, engaged father was a central theme in their experience of fatherhood.

**Active Participation:** Despite the challenges, most fathers took pride in their level of involvement with their children. They actively engaged in caregiving tasks such as changing diapers, feeding, and playing with their children. This hands-on approach was a source of pride, as many felt that their emotional and physical presence was central to being a good father. While some fathers acknowledged that men in their community or social circle might not typically take on these caregiving roles, they embraced the opportunity to do so, often learning from female relatives or their own past experiences with younger siblings.

The participants' narratives around active participation demonstrate a shift in traditional gender roles, as these young fathers embraced tasks typically associated with motherhood, such as feeding and changing diapers. This reflects a broader cultural shift toward more egalitarian parenting practices, even among teenage fathers who are often stereotyped as being disengaged or irresponsible.

## Theme 3. What Does It Mean to Be a Father?

**Provider Role:** The role of "provider" was a dominant theme in how the participants defined fatherhood. Despite their financial and educational limitations, these teenage fathers felt a strong sense of responsibility to support

their children and partners. However, they recognized that they could not fulfill this role independently, often relying on their parents or extended family for supplemental financial support. This reliance on family underscores the interconnected nature of fatherhood, where the extended family plays a critical role in helping the young father manage his responsibilities.

The desire to provide for their families was often met with frustration, as participants understood the economic realities that limited their ability to fully step into this role. Yet, despite these challenges, they remained committed to contributing what they could and expressed hope that further education or job opportunities would allow them to take on more responsibility in the future.

**Family Influence (Reiterated):** Fathers continued to recognize the importance of family support in navigating fatherhood. Their parents played an instrumental role not only in providing financial assistance but also in offering emotional support and modeling positive parenting behaviors. The relationships that were once described as strained became crucial lifelines after the birth of the participants' children. Family influence shifted from being a source of conflict to a source of strength, as many fathers credited their parents with helping them transition into their new roles.

**Active Participation (Reiterated):** Active participation remained a significant aspect of the fathers' experiences. Fathers who initially felt overwhelmed by the prospect of fatherhood grew into their roles by actively engaging in their children's lives. This involvement was not only practical—taking care of day-to-day needs—but also emotional, as fathers emphasized the importance of being physically and emotionally present for their children. The participants' enthusiasm for these caregiving roles challenges stereotypes of teenage fathers as being disengaged or uninvolved.

#### **Theme 4: Outcome of Adolescent Parenting**

##### **Educational Disruption and Financial Instability**

All participants discussed the significant disruption to their education due to the demands of fatherhood. Most were unable to continue their studies, either due to the need for employment or because they felt they had to prioritize their family's immediate needs. This aligns with research findings from Coley and Chase-Lansdale (1998), which show how early fatherhood often leads to lower educational attainment and reduced lifetime earnings.

- R1 and R4 stories exemplify the difficult choice many teenage fathers face between education and work.
- This disruption perpetuates the cycle of poverty, as these young men are forced to take low-income jobs that offer little upward mobility.

##### **2. Emotional and Psychological Strain**

The emotional toll of becoming a father at such a young age was a recurring theme. Many participants expressed feelings of inadequacy, guilt, and fear. This is consistent with studies by Futris et al. (2010), which found that adolescent fathers often struggle with the psychological demands of parenthood, particularly in the absence of adequate support.

- R2 highlighted the emotional strain of balancing his identity as both a child and a father, often feeling overwhelmed by the responsibility. He further expressed shame over his reliance on his parents, a sentiment frequently noted in research on teenage fathers who feel inadequate when they cannot fulfill traditional provider roles.

##### **3. Reliance on Family Support**

Many of the young fathers in this study relied heavily on their families for financial and emotional support. While this support was crucial, it also created feelings of dependency, which contributed to their sense of failure as providers. This theme echoes Mercer Sullivan's (1989) findings on resource disparities and family involvement, showing how the presence or absence of familial support can significantly influence a young father's ability to cope with parenthood.

- R6 narrative illustrates the tension between needing family support and the cultural expectation for fathers to be independent providers.

##### **4. Cultural Expectations of Fatherhood**

Cultural perceptions of fatherhood as the role of the primary provider were deeply ingrained in the participants' beliefs. Many expressed feelings of inadequacy when they were unable to meet these expectations, often comparing themselves to older men who had more resources and stability. This aligns with Paschal's (2006) discussion of how traditional models of fatherhood can create unrealistic standards for teenage fathers.

- R5 feelings of not being understood by his peers reflect how social and cultural expectations clash with the reality of adolescent fatherhood.

### **Theme 5: The Essence of Teenage Fathers' Needs, Attitudes, and Beliefs**

The study reveals that teenage fatherhood is not just a challenging experience but a transformative one. At the core of this transformation is the concept of the child as an agent of change. Participants entered fatherhood with fears, insecurities, and a lack of preparedness. However, through the experience of fatherhood, they found themselves motivated to make positive changes in their lives. The child became the driving force behind these changes, prompting fathers to abandon negative behaviors, seek education, and take on new responsibilities.

The theme of family influence was equally crucial, as participants' relationships with their families shifted from strained to supportive. The role of parents, particularly in providing financial and emotional support, was critical in enabling these young fathers to navigate their new roles. Family not only provided structure but also served as role models for how to be a responsible and engaged father.

While the participants struggled with the traditional provider role, they found confidence and satisfaction in their ability to actively participate in their children's lives. Their emotional and physical presence became a key part of how they defined fatherhood, showing that being a father is not just about financial provision but about being there for their child in meaningful ways.

Teenage fatherhood is a dynamic process characterized by personal growth, changing family dynamics, and a deep commitment to being actively involved in their children's lives. The findings underscore the importance of family support and the transformative potential of fatherhood, even for those facing significant socio-economic challenges.

### **Conclusion:**

The study on adolescent fathers in Adonkia, Freetown, Sierra Leone, offers deep insights into the unique experiences, attitudes, and beliefs of this marginalized group. The findings reveal that adolescent fathers face significant challenges, particularly in balancing their roles as caregivers and financial providers while still grappling with their own developmental transitions. Many of these young men enter fatherhood unprepared, yet their experiences reveal a transformative journey where fatherhood serves as a catalyst for positive behavioral change and a renewed sense of responsibility. Despite societal stereotypes, most adolescent fathers are actively involved in their children's lives, striving to redefine fatherhood in more nurturing and involved terms. Family support plays a critical role in their ability to manage their new responsibilities, though gaps in social and educational support systems hinder their ability to fully embrace fatherhood.

### **Recommendations:**

**1. Strengthen Emotional and Psychological Support:** The lack of emotional support systems for adolescent fathers needs to be addressed. The creation of peer support groups and counseling services could help young fathers navigate the complexities of early fatherhood and alleviate feelings of isolation.

**2. Educational and Vocational Programs:** Adolescent fathers need greater access to educational and vocational opportunities to enhance their financial stability. Tailored programs that provide parenting skills, reproductive health education, and career guidance would enable these young men to better support their families while continuing their education.

**3. Social Services for Teenage Fathers:** Community-based and school programs need to be expanded to include resources specifically for adolescent fathers. This should include parenting classes, mentorship programs, and initiatives aimed at breaking the cycle of poverty often associated with early fatherhood.

**4. Promote Positive Fatherhood Role Models:** Public campaigns that highlight the positive involvement of adolescent fathers in their children's lives could help dispel negative stereotypes. These campaigns should also promote a more inclusive and supportive view of fatherhood that goes beyond financial provision to emphasize emotional and nurturing roles.

**5. Longitudinal Research:** Further studies, particularly longitudinal research, are needed to track the long-term experiences of adolescent fathers. Understanding how their attitudes, challenges, and involvement in their children's lives evolve over time would provide valuable insights for developing more effective interventions.

These recommendations aim to empower adolescent fathers, improve their access to resources, and promote more supportive environments that facilitate both their personal development and their ability to provide for their children.

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