

## The Meaning of Life in Adolescents Who Have Experienced Pregnancy Outside of Marriage

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**Abstract.** Adolescence is a transitional period from childhood to adulthood. It's a time when individuals have sexual curiosity and interest. Some teenagers are sexually active, while others are not at all. Teenagers who have sex are at risk of experiencing unwanted pregnancies. The purpose of this study was to determine the description of the meaning of life in teenagers who experience pregnancy outside of marriage. This study is a qualitative study with thematic analysis techniques. Sampling in this study utilized purposive sampling, with a sample size of 5 participants. There are four main themes found: 1) Initial response during pregnancy, 2) Challenges, 3) Experiential Values, and 4) Hopeful Values. It shows that teenagers who are pregnant outside of marriage find sources of meaning in life through the love given by people around them, spiritual activities, and hope for themselves and their children to have a better life in the future.

**Keywords:** *Adolescence, Source of Meaning in Life, Pregnancy Outside of Marriage*

**Abstrak.** Masa remaja merupakan periode peralihan dari masa kanak-kanak menuju masa dewasa. Masa remaja adalah masa dimana individu memiliki rasa ingin tahu dan ketertarikan seksual. Sejumlah remaja aktif secara seksual sementara yang lainnya tidak aktif sama sekali. Remaja yang melakukan hubungan seks beresiko mengalami kehamilan yang tidak diinginkan. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui gambaran makna hidup pada remaja yang mengalami kehamilan di luar nikah. Penelitian ini adalah penelitian kualitatif dan menggunakan teknik analisis tematik. Pengambilan sampel dalam penelitian ini adalah purposive sampling dengan jumlah partisipan yang terlibat adalah 5 orang. Dari hasil analisa ditemukan empat tema utama: 1) Respon awal saat hamil, 2) Tantangan, 3) *Experiential Values*, 4) *Hopeful Values*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa remaja yang hamil di luar nikah memperoleh sumber makna hidup lewat cinta kasih yang diberikan orang sekitar, kegiatan spiritual, serta harapan bagi diri dan anak dimasa depan untuk memperoleh hidup yang lebih baik.

**Kata kunci:** *Remaja, Sumber makna hidup, Hamil di luar nikah*

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## **Introduction**

Throughout life, humans experience growth and development, starting from infancy, progressing through childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, until they reach old age. Adolescence is a transitional period that bridges the gap between childhood and adulthood. This period is one of the most crucial stages for the development of each individual, where adolescent development is influenced by interactions among several factors, including genetic, biological, and social factors. Adolescence is a period of sexual exploration and experimentation, where individuals have a curiosity and sexuality that can hardly be satisfied. Most adolescents are emotionally unprepared to deal with sexual experiences. Sexual activity carries risks if not accompanied by adequate protection. The risks faced by adolescents who have sex are unwanted pregnancies and infections transmitted through sexual activity (Santrock, 2012).

Based on data from the National Commission on Violence Against Women, child marriage dispensation has increased sevenfold since 2016. In 2021, the total number of applications for dispensation reached 59,709. The court cannot reject a large number of applications for child marriage dispensation because most of the girls who apply for dispensation are already pregnant. The results of a survey by the Indonesian Family Planning Association (PKBI) in 2006-2008 showed that 29.5-31.3% of NTT teenagers had premarital sex. 39 per 1,000 NTT teenagers give birth at the age of 15-19 years. In 2017, there were 548 cases of teenage pregnancy in Kupang City. Data from the National Population and Family Planning Agency (BKKBN) for the East Nusa Tenggara region in 2021 showed that 82,957 fertile couples in NTT were married under the age of 19 out of a total of 623,734 fertile couples. As many as

1,615,492 residents, out of a total of 4,292,522 people recorded by the BKKBN, do not have birth certificates.

The negative stigma given by society to women who are pregnant out of marriage can cause women who are pregnant out of wedlock to do several actions that are dangerous for themselves and their unborn babies. Kurniawati and Ambarwati (2019) explained that premarital pregnancy experienced by teenagers causes negative emotions to emerge as a response to the events experienced. The negative emotions that emerge are feelings of disappointment in oneself, confusion, shame, stress, and fear of telling their parents about their condition of being pregnant before marriage.

The pressure experienced by teenagers who experience pregnancy outside of marriage from their surroundings makes them tend to withdraw. The shame that arises within themselves causes the individual to choose not to interact with people in their environment. Research conducted by Astari and Laksmiwati (2021) regarding *"Psychological Well-Being Middle Adolescents Who Experience Pregnant Outside of Marriage"* explains that individuals, when they find out they are pregnant, feel shocked, angry, anxious, and afraid because they did not expect that they would experience this event. The negative stigma imposed by the community around them due to the events they have experienced causes individuals to be unable to accept themselves properly.

Despite experiencing bad events in their lives, teenagers who experience pregnancy outside of marriage also have the desired hopes for the future. These hopes can be realized by giving meaning to the life they currently have. Frankl (Bastaman, 2007) stated that if the meaning of life can be found, it will make life more meaningful. Individuals who can find meaning in life will feel happiness and avoid despair. The meaning of life is in life itself, both in happy and sad circumstances.

### **Method**

The purpose of this study is to determine the source of meaning in life for adolescents who have experienced pregnancy outside marriage. The research method used by the researcher is a qualitative method. Qualitative research methods are used to explain and analyze phenomena, events, dynamics, social, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions of a person or group toward something (Ratnaningtyas et al., 2023). The approach used in this study is a phenomenological approach. Phenomenological psychology research aims to understand the situations experienced in a person's daily life. Phenomenology aims to maintain the phenomena and contexts that emerge in the world. It means that in researching a phenomenon, involving individuals as the main parties in describing their lives (Smith, 2009).

The procedure for selecting participants in this study used a purposive sampling technique. Participants in this study were teenagers in Kupang City around 18-22 years old who experienced pregnancy outside of marriage, were not married, and had children under the age of five.

The data collection technique in this study utilizes the technique of photovoice. The data collection technique in this study uses the photovoice method to obtain the desired data. Photovoice is a combination of images and words. Photovoice is a technique designed to empower members of marginalized groups to work to identify, represent, and improve their communities through specific photographic techniques (Wang & Burris, 1997). Photovoice provides marginalized individuals with the opportunity to actively participate in improving their communities by sharing their stories and making their voices heard. The data analysis technique used by researchers in this study is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is the process of analyzing data by classifying and identifying patterns or themes that exist in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## Result

The number of participants in this study was five teenagers aged 19-22 years in Kupang City.

Table 1.  
*Participant Description*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Duration</b>
<b>Lili</b>	21	Student	15 May 2024	19 minutes
<b>Cactus</b>	22	Student	17 May 20204	23 minutes
<b>Edelweis</b>	22	Student	17 May 20204	26 minutes
<b>Rain</b>	21	Student	24 May 20204	15 minutes
<b>Rose</b>	19	Student	15 June 2024	12 minutes

The results of the interviews with five participants obtained four main themes. The first theme is the initial response of adolescents during pregnancy, which consists of two sub-themes, namely, the idea of suicide and abortion and the emergence of negative emotions. The second theme is challenges, which consists of two sub-themes: the stigma imposed by society and the challenges of raising children. The third theme is experiential values, with two sub-themes: love from close people and spiritual activities. The fourth theme is hopeful values, which consists of two sub-themes: hopes for oneself and children.

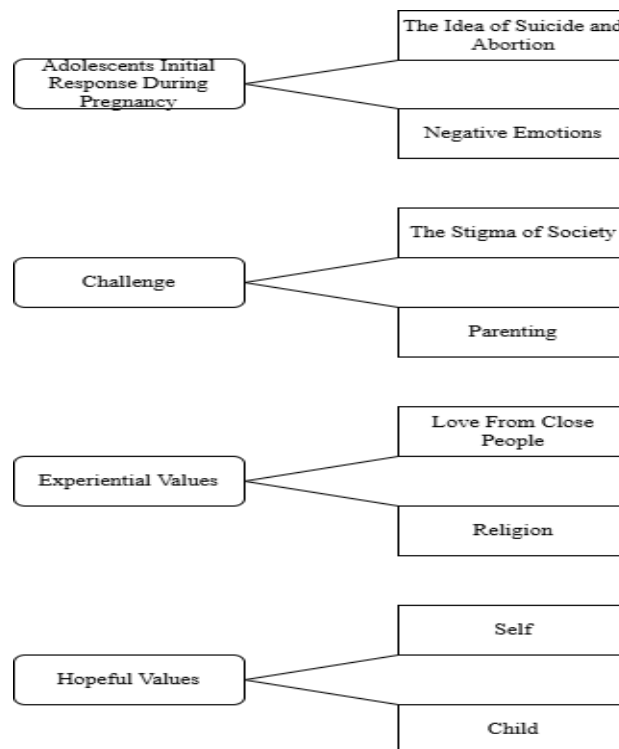


Figure 1. Theme and Sub-Theme

Information:  : Main theme  
 : Sub-theme

### Adolescents Initial Response During Pregnancy

Participants explained that when they first found out they were pregnant, they felt afraid and confused about telling their families and had intentions to commit suicide and have an abortion.

#### a. Suicidal Ideation and Abortion.

When they first find out about their pregnancy, teenagers have suicidal thoughts because of feelings of fear and shame and feeling that there is no way out of the problems they are experiencing. In addition, the attempt or intention to abort the pregnancy is one of the choices made by teenagers so that the pregnancy is not known to their parents and the surrounding environment, as acknowledged by Lili, Kaktus, and Rain in interviews.

*"...If other people find out, what will happen? What about college? The choice that was in my head at that time was to abort my pregnancy so that no one would know. If I abort, everything is safe, college is also safe. Every day I have the intention to commit suicide, what else can I do, my life is ruined, there is no way out..." (Interview with Lili)*

#### b. Negative Emotions

Teenagers who get pregnant out of wedlock feel negative emotions such as fear, confusion, and frustration due to the pregnancy they experience. When they first found out about their pregnancy, participants Lili, Kaktus, Rain, and Mawar felt frustrated, stressed, and confused if people around them knew about the pregnancy.

*"... when I saw the two lines on the test pack, I was frustrated. I mean, I felt like, what... So I was stressed, so when I remember the test pack, I feel like I really hate that test pack." (Rain Interview).*



Figure 2. The photo was taken by Rain, depicting the negative emotions felt by Rain at the beginning of her pregnancy

*" Well, I got pregnant while I was in college. So I felt a lot of fear and confusion. I didn't know what to do with this child because I was still in college." (Rose Interview).*

#### Challenge

Teenagers who experience pregnancy outside of marriage face several challenges in their lives, such as views given by society and challenges in raising children while attending school.

a. Stigma of Society

*"So I chose this dirty yard photo because other people, neighbors, people out there think of me like this... a bad woman. I'm a dirty woman, a naughty woman. What do they see me as... the looks they give me when they see me passing by are like cynical looks. Basically, their way of looking at me makes me uncomfortable. Whatever they say about me, I just keep quiet."* (Cactus Interview)



Figure 3. taken by Cactus illustrates how the surrounding reacts to them

b. Parenting

Lili, Cactus, Rain, and Edelweis said in interviews that they had difficulty raising children and dividing their time between raising children and attending lectures.

*"Yes, it's normal when a child is cranky like that, we try to control them, but they don't follow, that sometimes makes me angry. If they keep talking over and over again and they don't follow, then I pinch them, then they just cry. That's what sometimes makes me stressed, I don't know what to do if they are too naughty, especially if they are in a public place, then they are so naughty they beg for mercy..."*(Edelweiss Interview)

**Experiential Values**

Experiential Values (Values of Appreciation) are confidence and appreciation of values truth, faith, and love. Love from those closest to her. Teenagers who have been pregnant out of wedlock gain strength from the support given by family, partners, friends, and love for their children.



a. Love from closest people

Participant Lili in the interview stated that she received support from friends during her pregnancy.

*"...so this is where I live when I face that problem, I receive support and attention from my friends. Their presence really helps me. They don't leave me alone, but they are there and take care of me. Starting from small things, my friends pay attention, until when it's close to the time to give birth, they help accompany me to go buy supplies, food too, basically so that I and the child in my womb are fine.."(Lili Interview)*



Figure 4. taken by Lili depicts the residence during pregnancy, where Lili received support from her friends.

*"The plant is in front of my house. Every morning I see the plant as if there is my partner and my child, we are often together. So I usually share all my experiences with my partner, what I feel"(Rose Interview)*



Figure 5. taken by Mawar depicting the place where Mawar lives with her partner and child

The presence of children is also a strength and source of happiness for participants, as explained by Edelweis and Mawar in interviews.

*"...But now, if I want to do anything, I definitely think of him. I am happy when I see him healthy, able to laugh, able to play and be happy all the time, that makes me happy too. What's more, if I am tired or dizzy with other things that bother me, it can all feel lighter when I see my child's smile. Indeed, problems will not disappear or be solved immediately by seeing him, but every time I see him... I feel that I have the strength to be able to get through anything. I have a reason to keep my spirits up. So I am very grateful to have him in my life."(Edelweiss Interview)*



Figure 6. taken by Edelweiss depicts the presence of a child bringing happiness to Edelweiss

b. Religion

Belief in God is also a source of strength that enables participants to accept the situation and continue their lives better. Participants feel they gain peace and strength when they worship or pray to God. Lili in an interview stated that the love of God that she felt became the strength to face problems.

*"The second picture is a picture of Jesus. So Jesus is the strength I have when facing this problem. So when I am in a dilemma and desperate and have thought about doing something bad, I feel that God exists and He has the love that I feel that gives me more strength to be able to continue living. Even though I feel that this life is useless, it is destroyed. But every time I pray, tell stories and surrender to God, my heart feels calmer and believes that I can get through this problem well."(Lili Interview)*

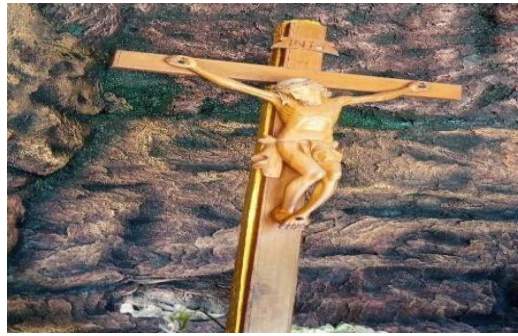


Figure 7. taken by Lili describes God as a source of strength

### Hopeful Values

Hopeful Values are beliefs about good things happening or changes in the future. Teenagers who are pregnant out of wedlock still have goals and hopes for their lives in the future.

a. Self

Teenagers who become pregnant out of wedlock have hopes for themselves to be able to complete their education, become good mothers, make their parents proud, and get a better job and life in the future.

*"So this sky photo is like my hope for the future. I want my life and my child's life to be as beautiful as the sky this afternoon. Although I made a mistake and my life is not going well, but there is still hope to fix it all as long as we are willing to try to change. So I am sure, one day my life will be better and I can make my children and parents happy."*(Cactus Interview)



Figure 8. The cactus depicts the hope that his life can be as beautiful as the evening sky

b. Child

The presence of children is a source of encouragement for participants. The presence of a child brings hope and purpose for participants.

*"I hope that my child can grow up healthy and be a good child. I hope I can take good care of my child and send him to school. I hope my child does not make the same mistakes as me. The point is I will do my best for my child so that he can be happy and always cheerful."*(Cactus Interview).

### **Discussion**

For teenagers who have sex outside of marriage when they find out they are pregnant, the responses that arise are feelings of fear, confusion, disappointment, and even the intention to have an abortion and commit suicide because they are not ready to face all the risks that will be encountered. Bastaman (2007) stated that when an individual experiences a tragic event, they tend to face negative feelings. Research conducted by Sejati, Istighosah, and Laisuwannachart (2023) found that teenagers who experience pregnancy outside of marriage have thoughts of aborting a pregnancy and attempting to abort the pregnancy. In addition, there are feelings of fear, confusion, and stress felt by teenagers when they find out they are pregnant.

When teenage pregnancy is known to people around them, the teenager will face the stigma given by the surrounding environment. Teenagers who get pregnant outside of marriage become a topic of conversation among the public and are often ostracized for violating religious values and existing norms due to having sex outside of marriage. Research conducted by Iriyanto and Gustina (2024) found that teenagers who get pregnant outside of marriage receive a negative stigma from society. Teenagers are often labelled as irresponsible individuals who are unable to take care of themselves. This causes teenagers to become individuals who often close themselves off from their environment, feel uncomfortable, and rarely engage in activities outside the home because they avoid interaction with the surrounding community.

In addition to the negative stigma, teenagers who get pregnant out of wedlock also face challenges in raising children. Unpreparedness to assume the new role of motherhood can lead to stress in raising children, especially when the child is difficult to manage. Teenagers who have become mothers and are still in education are indeed required to divide their time between fulfilling their educational obligations as children and their maternal responsibilities as mothers. Dayaningsih et al. (2020) explained that teenage mothers experience role conflict, confusion, and restrictions when carrying out their roles. Teenagers are not cognitively and emotionally ready to raise children and often lack the necessary knowledge to do so. The difficulties experienced by teenage mothers in raising their first child are caused by both internal factors, such as a lack of knowledge, limited experiences, feelings of inadequacy, and unachieved developmental tasks, and external factors, including the support available from those around them and the child's health condition.

The bad experiences that are experienced can be overcome by teenagers who are pregnant outside of marriage by having a source of meaning in life. The source of meaning in life for teenagers who experience pregnancy outside of marriage is derived from experiential values, appreciation values, and hopeful values, as well as hope. The love and attention given by the people around them, namely family, friends, and partners, encourage participants to be able to face all challenges. In addition to support from those around them, love for children also makes them stronger and more grateful individuals. Perez-Lopez et al. (Tjolly & Soetjningsih, 2023) stated that adolescents who receive support from those around them, especially family, will gain positive emotions. The support provided helps adolescents adapt to their circumstances and feel no need to focus on others' opinions. The love and attention given by those around them help adolescents who are pregnant out of wedlock find the strength to live their lives with a new role as a mother.

Teenagers also gain strength through praying and worshiping God. Humaidah, et al. (2024) explained that in Indonesian culture, religion and spirituality play a significant role in everyday life. Religious coping can be a significant source of

support in dealing with various life pressures. Religious coping can take the form of prayer, meditation, or reading the Bible, providing individuals with a sense of control and meaning in life, which is essential in dealing with crises. By engaging in spiritual activities, individuals can provide a sense of control and meaning in one's life that is essential in dealing with a crisis.

In addition to the value of appreciation, adolescents also find a source of meaning in life through hope, which can encourage and motivate them to develop enthusiasm and commitment to achieve their life goals in the future. Adolescents who are pregnant out of wedlock have the hope of being able to complete their education and get a good job in the future as well as make their parents happy and fulfill their children's needs. Bastaman (2007) explains that hope is a belief in positive things that will happen in the future. Hope can provide new opportunities and goals in life, fostering an optimistic attitude and belief that they can achieve a better life. Hope contains the meaning of life because it embodies the belief that better changes will occur.

### **Conclusion**

Teenagers who get pregnant out of wedlock find a source of meaning in life through experiential values (appreciation values) and hopeful values (expected values). Experiential value (values of appreciation), obtained by teenagers through the love and support given by the people around them and belief in God as the primary source of help makes teenagers gain the strength to face the problems they experience. The second source of meaning in life is hopeful values (expectation value), which adolescents obtain through the hopes they have for themselves and their children in the future. The hopes held by adolescents who are pregnant out of wedlock to obtain a better life in the future encourage adolescents not to give up easily and to continue living to achieve the desired goals.

The support and love given by those closest to them, faith in God and hope held by teenagers who are pregnant out of wedlock make them able to face all the

challenges that exist. The source of meaning in life that they have makes them gain strength when they experience confusion, frustration, and fear and have the intention to have an abortion and commit suicide so that they can get through their difficult times and face all the risks of the actions they do. to get a better life in the future encourages teenagers not to give up easily and to keep living to achieve the desired goals.

### *Suggestions*

For participants, namely teenagers who are pregnant out of wedlock, it is suggested that they learn how to raise children better from their parents and be more open with their parents about the problems they are experiencing. For families, it is suggested that they improve communication with participants, allowing them to be more open about the problems they are facing. Additionally, taking care of participants can help establish a strong marriage bond, making them feel more confident about determining their future. Families are also expected to be able to pay attention to their children's development and educate children about the risks of having sex outside of marriage so that the same thing does not happen in the family in the future. For the community, it is suggested that they appreciate and establish better relationships and help teenagers who are pregnant out of wedlock in taking on new roles by providing the necessary information, so that these teenagers can feel comfortable within society.



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